

Ethiopia in Transit

Millennial Quest for Stability and
Continuity

Edited by

**Pietro Toggia, Melakou Tegegn and
Abebe Zegeye**



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The writings in this edition explore historical and contemporary issues in Ethiopia as the country underwent change and celebrated its new millennium. However, despite the recognizance of socio-economic and political changes, Ethiopia still faces enduring problems and challenges to its stability and continuity. The political past haunts the country while it is facing the future with optimism and hope. The contributors in this edition examine historical and contemporaneous issues with different lenses; they investigate the multiplicity and complexity of the contradictions that define traditional and modern Ethiopia. The contributions highlight the significance of the instability, dislocation, conflict and transformation inherent in any society. None of these writings, however, celebrate the forces that create the conflict; they are cautious not to glorify the present and romanticize the past. On the contrary, they seek to contextualize the challenges which the country faces with a view to open a dialogue, not exclusively among Ethiopians, but with scholars and social activists in the rest of Africa, as well as the international community. The contributions cover and examine such important topics as historiography, political power and state legitimacy, ideology and radical views, knowledge transmission and modernity, emigration and the Ethiopian Diaspora, ethnic and linguistic identity, nationalism, feminist discourses in a patriarchal and traditional society, public policies and economic development, traditional and modern art and culture, and neoliberalism and globalization *vis-à-vis* a sub-Saharan African nation.

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Contents

1. Editorial note	
<i>Pietro Toggia, Melakou Tegegn and Abebe Zegeye</i>	1
2. History writing as a state ideological project in Ethiopia	
<i>Pietro Toggia</i>	5
3. Modernity, Eurocentrism, and radical politics in Ethiopia, 1961–1991	
<i>Teshale Tibebe</i>	31
4. The Beta Israel and the impossible return	
<i>Abebe Zegeye</i>	59
5. Who is Amhara?	
<i>Mackonen Michael</i>	79
6. A new discourse on ‘gender’ in Ethiopia	
<i>Indrawatie Biseswar</i>	91
7. An investigation into the maintenance of the Maale language in Ethiopia	
<i>Lawrie Barnes and Kobus van Aswegen</i>	117
8. The EPRDF <i>vis-à-vis</i> Ethiopia’s development challenges	
<i>Melakou Tegegn</i>	131
9. A retrospective observation of Elias Sime	
<i>Meskerem Assegued</i>	163
10. Situated neoliberalism and urban crisis in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	
<i>Fassil Demissie</i>	191
<i>Index</i>	214

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EDITORIAL NOTE

A prologue to critical discourses on Ethiopia

Ethiopia has a much longer history of self-rule than any other African country. The 1896 Battle of Adwa at which Italy's colonialism succumbed to Ethiopia has been memorialized by Africans as one of their first triumphant engagements against intruders in the pages of modern history. The diverse aspects of its history, its rich literature and pluralistic culture are hardly appreciated in the rest of Africa. In far too many scholarly writings Ethiopia is seen as an island, blighted by the ghost of localism. Emergent but vigorous debates about the country have tended to remain insular, undertaken for the most part by Ethiopians at home and in the Diaspora. While these are important, because detailed understandings of Ethiopia have emerged from such studies, sometimes this fixation and self-referential discourse on Ethiopia by Ethiopians can result in academic seclusion.

Ethiopia is often depicted as static, closed-off from external influences; and Ethiopian scholars as provincial and inward-looking. Even cases of commendable solidarity of Ethiopians with African liberation struggles in Kenya, South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique are occluded and not fully appreciated in the rest of the continent. One manifestation of the localism of scholarship on Ethiopia is the passion about the 1970s politics of the military *derg*. It is true that Colonel Mengistu's period was marked by bloodshed. And yet, it would be a misrepresentation to suggest, as some scholars have done, that all Ethiopians have known is the violence of the *derg*. When compared to imperial rule prior to 1974, and to the period after the *derg* was overthrown in 1991, a romanticized picture of life in Ethiopia is constructed.

The media, Western government officials and scholars are either inadvertently or for selfish motives responsible for these inaccuracies. They have blemished Ethiopia's image by presenting it as the proverbial (biblical) land of famine, and by extension as representing Africa's chronic poverty. Few of the contradictions of Ethiopia as a modern state are discussed. Its war with Eritrea, its incursions into Somalia, its constructions and reinforcements of ethnicities, its alignment with the United States in the latter's 'war against terrorism' in the region, are all cases in point.

For example, in the news communiqué on the last controversial election in Ethiopia in May 2005, the assistant director of public information at the Carter Centre announced that the election was 'the third in its 3,000-year old history' (Terrence 2005). Similarly, Donald Yamamoto, then US deputy assistant secretary of state (currently US ambassador to Ethiopia) echoed this observation in March 2006: the election, he said, 'marked the first, true multiparty election in Ethiopia's 3,000 year history' (2006). These observations are obviously exaggerated and decontextualized because elections and liberal democracy have only been part of the history of Western countries for a little more than 200 years. Of course, a subtext of mockery is also evident here, pointing towards the espousal of a Western mode of election and governance in underdeveloped African nations. The static images

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

represented in studies and observations on Ethiopia camouflage the constant flux of the country. Young (1995, p.4) suggests that '...fixations of identities [are] only sought in situations of instability and disruption of conflict and change'.

The contributions in this special issue make the necessary preliminary steps to critically examine the constructions of Ethiopia; the articles also interrogate historical and contemporaneous issues from different angles, as well as the multiple contradictions that define present-day Ethiopia. The essays emphasize the significance of the 'instability', 'disruption', 'conflict', and 'change' inherent in any society. None of the essays celebrate or glorify the forces that create conflict in Ethiopia; instead, these articles seek to contextualize the challenges that face the country with a view to open a dialogue, not exclusively among Ethiopians, but with scholars in the rest of Africa, as well as in the international community.

Pietro Toggia argues that Ethiopian history reserves a privileged site for successive states as incontestable sites of knowledge, truth, legitimacy, and national identity. He shows how the state reconstructs the memory of its past as total knowledge, and how the state utilizes this 'truth' of the past to command legitimacy. The state-authorized historiography has been packaged as a foundational knowledge for the nation, national identity, and the *raison d'être* of state power. As much as Ethiopia's history has been always a totalizing narrative, the historians have also been strategically selective in reflecting the history of the militarily and politically dominant groups. According to Toggia, Ethiopian history books have been generally reductionist, and history writing has always been a state project. The article suggests the need, in critical studies, to challenge the state historiography, as the dominant unicentric narrative framework.

Teshale Tibebu's contribution provides a critical reflection of radicalism in Ethiopia in the 30-year period from 1961 to 1991. His essay highlights three main points. First, unlike any other place in the history of revolutions, Ethiopia went through *three simultaneous revolutions* during the 1974–1991 period: those in Eritrea, Tigray and Ethiopia at large. Second, almost all the military conflicts that consumed hundreds of thousands of lives in the country were conducted among political forces that were Marxist, or Marxist-oriented. Third, Marxism was deeply embedded in the Eurocentric structure of knowledge. Ethiopian Marxism by extension was Eurocentric in its grasp of the Ethiopian situation. It rejected Ethiopia's historical past and tradition as being a reactionary pile of refuse badly in need of cleansing with forces of modernity. The essay presents a critical reflection of this Eurocentric paradigm, in general, and its adaptation in Ethiopia, in particular.

Abebe Zegeye's essay explores the historical origins of the Beta Israel people; it analyzes the conditions of their existence in mainland Israel and critiques the notions of displacement and the Diaspora as applied to their historical experience in Ethiopia. Zegeye argues that the existential experiences of the Beta Israelis can best be described as Diasporic. The Diaspora is in fact the language of those on the margins of history; those who nevertheless insist on having their stories told from their point of view. The Diaspora acknowledges the possibility of returning to imagined communities previously abandoned. Ironically, the Diaspora also forces us to reckon with the possibility of taking up options such as integration and dissolution in host-communities. These are choices and processes fraught with contradictions; they leave permanent social and historical imprints on the affected people and can produce unintended or unexpected consequences for the communities in the Diaspora.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Mackonen Michael demonstrates that although Ethiopia is home to many ethnic groups and nationalities, some have more recognition than others; and some traditionally view themselves as superior to others. He also notes that the discourse on ethnicity and nationalism has been limited to internal circles of radical students and intellectuals. The central argument of his essay is to question and define the ethnic hegemony of the Amhara people. The article thus examines Amhara identity and Ethiopian nationalism within the country as well as in the Diaspora.

Indrawatie Biseswar argues that Ethiopia seems to be charting a unique discourse on women which is similar to many of the 'gender' discourses on the continent (Namibia, Jamaica, Cameroon, etc.) that are embedded in the state. Her essay shows how the absence of a comprehensive radical gender discourse and the rigorous focus on a depoliticized national women's discourse produces an extremely narrow outlook that is actively promoted as meeting the demands of women's emancipation, rights and freedom in the country.

Lawrie Barnes and Kobus van Aswegen explore the usages of Maale, a minority language spoken in the Omo region of south-western part of Ethiopia; and they suggest that regional nationalism, which is isomorphic with ethnic groups in Ethiopia, such as the Maale, corresponds to ethnic nationalism of Paulston's model. This, they argue, is the reason why the Maale language has been maintained as a viable language in spite of centuries of political repression. They claim that the Maale (as a minority language-group) have never experienced a language shift or a language death.

Melakou Tegegn's article also provides a critique of the public policies that the government of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has followed to deal with political and economic challenges since 1991. He argues that these government policies show only minimal success in alleviating poverty and enhancing development. Tegegn also identifies five of the following challenges that the government continues to face: chronic deficit in political democracy; gender inequality; environmental degradation; unchecked population growth; and the crisis of rural development.

Meskerem Assegued's article focuses on the biography and the artworks of an Ethiopian artist – Elias Sime. Her essay describes the seamless levels of this Ethiopian art form, depicting social life in realistic portraits. Assegued suggests that the paradoxical blend of poverty and richness of socio-temporal life in Ethiopia is conducive for Elias Sime's works of art.

The final piece for this special issue of *African Identities* is contributed by Fassil Demissie. His essay is a critical examination of neo-liberalism in post-1991 Ethiopia and he advances two major arguments. First, he identifies the characteristic features of the neo-liberal project in Ethiopia in this period; these features are the privatisation of the economy; the devaluation of the currency; the major reform of fiscal policy to reduce the deficit; deregulation of the market; and other forms of state disengagement as a fulfilment to the condition of the country's integration into the global capitalist system. Second, Demissie argues that these neo-liberal programmes are exacerbating the adverse conditions under which urban residents live in cities like Addis Ababa.

This special issue of *African Identities* ends with a book review by Pietro Toggia who surveys Abera Jembere's *An Introduction to the Legal History of Ethiopia, 1434–1974* (2000).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

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Pietro Toggia, Melakou Tegegn and Abebe Zegeye

History writing as a state ideological project in Ethiopia

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In this article I argue that Ethiopian history reserves a privileged site for successive states as incontestable sites of knowledge, truth, legitimacy, and national identity. It shows how the state reconstructs memory of its past as total knowledge, and how the state utilizes this 'truth' of the past to command legitimacy. The state-authorized history has been packaged as a foundational knowledge for the nation, national identity, and *raison d'être* of state power. As much as Ethiopia's history has been always a totalizing narrative, the historians have also been strategically selective in reflecting the history of the militarily and politically dominant groups. Ethiopian history has been reductionist and history writing has been a state project. This study critically examines how the state's history as a metanarrative claims totality; and how everything else is silently subsumed under its totalized discourse. It excludes marginalized populations, ethnic and religious polities. As much as the state attempts to centralize every outlying domain around its power core, it simultaneously exteriorizes them through state discourses. Moreover, the paper suggests the need to challenge the state historiography, as the dominant unicentric narrative framework, with critical historiography.

Introduction

In this article I argue that Ethiopian history reserves a privileged site for successive states as an incontestable domain of knowledge, truth, legitimacy and national identity. Not only do the states welcome this form of history writing as key source of totalized knowledge, but they also actively adopted it as one of their ideological projects to legitimize the state power and to reconstruct a national identity. The production and dissemination of past knowledge as history was systematized especially under Emperor Haile Selassie's government, with extensive publication of history textbooks for all grades and higher education. As much as Ethiopia's history has always been a totalizing narrative, the historians have also been strategically selective in reflecting the history of the militarily and politically dominant groups. Ethiopian history has been reductionist and history writing has been a state project.

I will show how the state reconstructs memory of the state's past as total knowledge, and how it utilizes this 'truth' of the past to command legitimacy. The state-authorized history has been packaged as a foundational knowledge for the nation, national identity, and *raison d'être* of state power. The state has accorded

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

itself a privileged position in the pages of history as a transhistorical and epistemological entity. Writing history, as a state project, has also facilitated a mutual accommodation between theological institutions and political ruling groups. The earlier royal scribes were invariably clerics of the Ethiopian Tewahdo Christian Orthodox Church.

Ethiopian state history as a case study illustrates the interplay of knowledge/truth production and the exercise of power. This essay reveals how political history is more privileged than any social, economic, or cultural aspects of the social field. Similarly, this study demonstrates how the state's history as a metanarrative claims totality; and how everything else is silently subsumed under its totalized discourse. It excludes marginalized populations, ethnic and religious polities. As much as the state attempts to centralize every outlying domain around its power core, it simultaneously exteriorizes them through state discourses. Hence, due to the fact that knowledge of the past has been selectively represented as state history, it often faces a representational crisis along with other sectarian state projects.

The paper also critically explores how ethnohistories challenge the unicentric narrative of the state as one feature of resistance by ethnonational movements. The political challenge to Ethiopia's central state encompasses a contention of the unrepresentativeness of the nation's history which reflects only state history of the dominant military and political groups. Thus while the pages of Ethiopian history affirm the legitimacy of the state, they simultaneously evoke resistance and struggle from subaltern groups which have no space even in the margins of those history pages.

Moreover, the paper suggests the need to challenge the state historiography, as the dominant unicentric narrative framework, with critical historiography. This daunting task may seem difficult partly due to the hegemony of this form of history, and partly due to the materialization of this form of knowledge in the national consciousness. The idea of deconstructing such a unicentric and totalized Ethiopian history, a narrative that continues to face a representational crisis, in the current politically charged atmosphere possibly invoke *erg'man* (total denunciation). Nonetheless, Foucault's (1972) incisive observation prepares one for such an intellectual challenge. Foucault noted that one should expect to be condemned for 'murdering history' (1972, p. 14). He further noted:

One will be denounced for attacking the inalienable rights of history and the very foundation of any possible historicity. But one must not be deceived: what is being bewailed with such vehemence is not the disappearance of history, but the eclipse of that form of history that was secretly, but entirely related to ... the movement of totalization ...; what is being bewailed is the ideological use of history by which one tries to restore to man everything that has unceasingly eluded him for over a hundred years. (Foucault 1972, p. 14)

The totalized and unicentric form of state historiography conceives a set of fundamental contradiction within its framework. First, it delimits itself from exploring the past by working in a closed discipline and selective archives; it restricts itself with the contentment of the affirmation and reaffirmation among 'kith and kin' historians in reaffirming the teleological view of successive state history. Working in such a closed system fundamentally contradicts what Foucault calls 'the living openness of history' (1972, p.13). Thus, one has to critically explore multi-faceted features of the country's history, stepping outside of this closed system. Second, this

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

form of history not only reserves ultimate privileges for such concepts as *menegest* (state) and *be'herawi gizat* (national territory), but also treats them as static and frozen in time; and therefore, as paradoxical as it may sound, as suprahistorical concepts.

The statement of history

As Veyne notes, the understanding of history is not so much a matter of the power of explanation but how it is arranged in a 'comprehensible plot' (1984, p. 87). The historian's explanation means conveying the 'plot' of history; it means how the narratives organize acts and events in order to render them comprehensible to readers. Ethiopian state historiography has developed its own unique dominant plot. It underlies the permanence, continuity, and unity of the Ethiopian state from ancient times to the present. The historical representation of the linearity and unity of the state is distinctly associated with the emerging modern state in Ethiopia at the beginning of this century. Hence, state historiography appeared in this period as one aspect of the state's centralization and modernization projects in portraying state history as totalized 'truth' and the inevitability of linear progression to modernity. This dominant historical narrative renders unity and continuity to disparate political events in form of a seamless, linear succession of Ethiopian rulers. This unicentric narrative also explores a singular origin; and incontestably declares the finding of one in the ancient site.

The narrating of Ethiopian history always begins with the origin of the state in the ancient Axumite Kingdom founded at Axum and the port of Adulis around 200 BC. It culminates with the present state centred in the capital, Addis Ababa. Historians generally believe that migrants from South Yemen, known as *Habashats* and *Agazeans*, settled in northern Ethiopia around 1000 BC and later founded the ancient Ethiopian 'state'. Budge (1970, p. xviii) declares the period of both the discovery of the 'origin' of the country and the genesis of Ethiopia history in the following statement: 'Real history begins with the founding of the kingdom of Aksum, either in the first century BC or the first century AD.' All like-minded historians who work within the closed system of state historiography explicitly and implicitly refer to prehistory in the periods that they often classify as pre-Axumite or proto-Axumite. According to them, a period or a region or a people without archaeological findings and texts has no history; and all these depend upon the focal concerns of historians or their lack of interest thereof. Historical facts do not speak for themselves until historians make the interpretations and determination of their findings, based on 'selections and arrangements' within the framework of 'an *a priori* decision' (Carr 1961, p. 9).

To provide a sense of this historical plot I include here a schematic sketch. Beginning with the Axumite Empire, the narration identifies the fourth-century AD kingdom as a Christian 'state' converted from paganism. Around the ninth century AD the Axumite empire fell, followed by the ascendancy of the 'usurping' Zagwe dynasty whose reign lasted until the end of the thirteenth century. By 1270 the 'glorious' Solomonic dynasty returned to rule until its last monarchy – i.e., until the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in September 1974. The military revolutionary state seized power in 1974 and ruled until it was overthrown and replaced with a Tigrean-dominated ethnic federal state in May 1991. This is how the long period of Ethiopian

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

history has been invariably narrated by all Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian historians largely since the 1940s (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, Gasparini 1953, Ullendorff 1960 and 1968, Mekuria 1959, 1961a, 1961b and 1968, Doresse 1959, Greenfield 1965, Huntingford 1965, Budge 1966 and 1970, Pankhurst 1967, Perham 1969, Taye 1972, Hable Selassie 1972, Tamrat 1972, Levine 1974, Kobischanov 1979, Wolde-Selassie 2007).

The documentary sources of Ethiopian state history include a list of kings, royal chronicles, hagiographical literature, Greek epics, Arabic and European travel history, royal epigraphic memorials, and such archaeological findings in coins, thrones, and palace remains. On closer critical examination, the sources are not only incomplete but also alarmingly unreliable and less transparent to reconstruct the uninterrupted historical past of the state.

In the preface to his *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History*, Hable Selassie (1972), noted that ‘the sources were scattered in different places’, and he acknowledges that the task of writing his book ‘was not an easy one’. Nonetheless, he completed the first draft of the book, covering the historical period from ancient times to 1270, in just two years in 1965.

In similar vein, the other prolific Ethiopian historian, Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria,¹ acknowledges the ‘paucity and conflicting historical data’ on the basis of which to reconstruct the ‘long’ Ethiopian state history (Mekuria 1959, p. 5). Yet he affirms that it is the historian’s task to give order to the chaotic data, to reconcile the conflicting interpretations, and to present what little is available to the judgment of the readers until enough historical evidence is forthcoming (p. 6). Rationalizing the historian’s ‘will to know,’ albeit with incomplete and incoherent documentary sources, Mekuria defends his writing project as a ‘complete’ history of the Ethiopian state in four volumes. He published the following four volumes: *A History of Ethiopia from Emperor Tewodros to Haile Selassie* (1968); *A History of Ethiopia from Emperor Libne Dingil to Tewodros* (1961a); *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia, Axum and the Zagwe* (1959); and *A History of Ethiopia from Emperor Yukuno Amlak to Libne Dingil* (1961b). His works cover a long history from 1600 BC to 1968, a total of 3,500 years reconstructed with considerable gaps and lack of documentation. All the four volumes of Mekuria’s Ethiopian state history *qua* Ethiopia’s history written in Amharic were extensively used as required history text books in all elementary and secondary public schools.

In Ethiopian state historiography, both long and short periods which exhibited discontinuity among different reigns were not seriously accounted for: they were simply glossed over as anomalous historical events. For instance, the hundred years between the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries was a period of internal warfare among different regional feudal lords, an era which was known as the *Zemene Mesafint* – ‘the era of the nobility’. During this period, there were no powerful kings who could impose the continuity of a legendary dynasty. Nonetheless, Mekuria’s state history, without any claim of continuity by kings, is recorded as continuous. Writing about this period, Crummey notes that the nobles ‘justified their rule along lines analogous to those of the court. Strict dynastic Solomonic legitimacy was claimed by no one, since this would have been synonymous with assumption of the throne, and this did not take place until 1855’ (1981, p. 237). During the five years of Italian colonial occupation (1936–1941), while Emperor Haile Selassie was in exile in London, the history of occupation was simply understated and was written about as a period of contention

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

in order to dismiss the idea of state disrapture. Thus the chronological narratives in Ethiopia's state historiography are set in what Anderson termed 'homogeneous, empty time' (1995, p. 26).

Moreover, even after the monarchy was abolished in favour of the revolutionary change in September 1974, the long, continuous history of the Ethiopian state was affirmed by the military leaders despite the rupture after the establishment of the socialist social order. As a matter of fact, in the 1980s when separatist ethnonational political forces challenged the unity of the Ethiopian state, the revolutionary military state (the Derg) ironically commissioned the noted royal historian, Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria, once again to write a series of books on Ethiopia's unity and past history. Mekuria came to the rescue legitimizing the revolutionary state – a revolutionary state that earlier on had attempted to fundamentally depart from the feudal legacy of the past. He prepared three volumes of state history in Amharic language. As the master trope of the narratives features the continuity of the state, each volume in the sequel underscores the unity of the Ethiopian state in specifically selected periods.

The title of each volume clearly reflects the theme of continuity and unity of the project: *Emperor Tewodros II and Ethiopian Unity* (1989), *Emperor Yohannes IV and Ethiopian Unity* (1991a), and *Emperor Menelik II and Ethiopian Unity* (1989b).² The three-volume work covers the half century period beginning in 1855, corresponding to the reigns of the three emperors. The state-owned publisher *Kuraz* (Lamp), in its publisher's note, indicates that the purpose of these historical series on Ethiopian emperors and Ethiopian unity is to revive and reaffirm the unity and territorial integrity of the country. Thus, as Anderson cogently observes, 'the more the ancient dynastic state is naturalized, the more its antique finery can be wrapped around revolutionary shoulders' (1995, p. 160).

The current heated debate on Ethiopian history among Ethiopian scholars and political activists has no parallel. The intensity of the current debate is generated since the coming to power of the Tigrean-dominated political organization and the displacement of the unitary state by ethnic federalism. The present ethnically federated state recognizes the 'right of ethnic groups to secede' in Article 39 of the 1995 constitution, and actually endorsed the secession of the northern region of Eritrea from the Ethiopian state in May 1993. In the state's ethnic federal arrangement, the ruling group has redrawn the state's regions into nine ethnically administered units, called *kileloch* (regions).³ Moreover, it challenges the traditional Ethiopian history as being Amhara-centred and exclusionary towards other ethnic groups. Accordingly, it revised the history lessons in all public schools and Addis Ababa University's curricula to reflect the heterogeneity of ethnonational groups. Such a counter-hegemonic project towards traditional Ethiopian history is critically viewed by unitarian forces as tantamount to disintegrating the unitary state. The debate also reflects the crisis of state history in the face of serious challenges by subaltern groups. Even more interestingly, once minority groups wield state power they seek blessing from the altars of conventional history by claiming legitimate continuity from the political past. For example, the current prime minister, in his speech during the celebration of the new Ethiopian millennium in September 2007, arrogated to his government a unique historical place as a nexus between the glorious past and the luminary future. He reaffirmed:

It is therefore with an acute sense of where we have been in the past and where we are now, with a *keen sense of our historical mission* that I call upon you today to stay the

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

course of the Ethiopian renaissance, to continue to work hard to make *our current reality a mere footnote in our long and glorious history*. It is with a sense of historical mission and total confidence in our capacity to overcome all challenges that I call upon you today *on the eve of a new millennium to join hands to rebuild Ethiopia* that we all can be proud of. It is with rekindled hope and confidence of the last years of the second millennium that I call upon you to realize the Ethiopian renaissance in all its forms poetically, economically socially and culturally. (Zenawi, 11 September 2007, emphasis added)

The above statement illustrates the ‘acute sense of history’ among modern Ethiopian political rulers, particularly in the last hundred years. In March 1905, Emperor Menelik commissioned Aleqa Taye to go to Germany to undertake historical research and collect books and manuscripts written on Ethiopia.⁴ In similar vein, Emperor Haile Selassie was not only fully supportive of Ethiopian historians; he was by far a unique ruler with exceptional ‘sense of history’ who surrounded himself with senior government appointees who were also history writers. The two noted historians – Tekle Tsadik Mekuria and Hiruy Welde-Selassie – were his senior government officials with ministerial portfolios. Three other senior officials – Kebede Tesema, Yilma Deressa, and Hadis Alemayehu – had written history books and memoirs. Even more interestingly, he is still the only Ethiopian ruler who wrote his own autobiography in Amharic in 1973, entitled *he’ywote’na ye’ Ethiopia irmja* (My life and the progress of Ethiopia). In writing his autobiography he deliberately departed both from the conventional style of *mewa’ele zena* (Royal chronicles) written by scribes; he also challenged any distortion of his political biography written by others.⁵ Neither of his immediate successors, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, nor Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, had such political (auto)biographies.⁶

The question, therefore, is why history, as knowledge of the past and as ‘truth’, is so important to different Ethiopian states and politically contending forces? Certainly Foucault’s insightful notion of the inseparability of knowledge and power is evident here. As Plumb notes, once the past is institutionalized it remains a force (1970, p. 44). History writing certainly can be utilized by the states to establish hegemony. Plumb adds:

The past, however, is not only justified, it is educated. It had to contain the wisdom, the morality, the dreams and the solace. It was needed to strengthen the purpose of those who possessed power and, equally important, to reconcile those who lacked it. All who were literate turned to it, at some time or other, not only for knowledge, but for human truths. (p. 45)

The historical genre reflected in the discrete *mewa’ele zena* (Royal chronicles), as well as in the chronological narratives, exclusively dwell upon state history, reducing the country’s general history mainly to political history. The historical narratives implicitly and explicitly are organized around recurring themes of the continuity, unity, and identity of the state from its primordial existence to the present. A number of separately written books in the liturgical *Ge’ez* language under the general title, *Tarika Negest* (History of Kings), illustrates this narrative style. But one particular book that influenced and shaped this unique historical genre of Ethiopia’s state’s history is the *Kibre Negest* (Glory of Kings), which was written in the fourteenth century by six Tigrean scribes at Axum. The *Kibre Negest*, written in the ancient Ethiopian *Ge’ez* script, incorporates oral and written traditions from Ethiopia and the Middle East.⁷ It encompasses citations from 31 books of the Old Testament, 20 books of the New Testament, from the Talmud, from Koranic stories, and rabbinic

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

commentaries (Budge 1922, Ullendorf 1968, Levine 1974). The *Kibre Negest* locates the source of power of Ethiopian kings in God's covenant, and their royal genealogy in the House of David. According to the *Kibre Negest*, the legitimacy of Ethiopian kings was established as divinely ordained. Here, the biblical references to the nation and rulers are often cited by many historians as authoritative sources, though acknowledging them as secondary sources.

The principal account of the *Kibre Negest* is about the legend of Queen Sheba of Ethiopia and King Solomon of Israel. As Ullendorf notes, the legend of Queen Sheba has indeed a 'mythopoeic power' in the history of the Ethiopian state until the present day (1968, p. 132). The story is about the ancient Ethiopian queen who, fascinated with the wisdom of King Solomon, visited Solomon in Israel. When she returned to Ethiopia she gave birth to his son, Menelik I. As King Solomon's son, his reign heralded the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia. The book's references to the Providence, the Bible, the holy land, and most importantly to the political wisdom of King Solomon as a remarkable administrator and the dynasty he implanted in Ethiopia, has rendered legitimacy to the Ethiopian 'state.' The book also professes the ultimate triumph of the Ethiopian 'state' over its rival powers. Levine observes that 'the *Kibre Negest* is a societal script and a unified epic' (1974, p. 93). Queen Sheba's legendary visit to King Solomon is still popularly depicted in traditional paintings mostly intended for tourists.⁸ Moreover, Article 2 of Ethiopia's 1955 revised modern state constitution stipulates: 'The Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Haile-Selassie I, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem.'

Similarly, Article 249 of Ethiopia's first modern Penal Code prohibits any 'outrages against the dynasty'. The article which defines *lèse-majesté*, stipulated as follows:

Whoever attempts to break or modify the order of succession to the Throne, by violence, threats, conspiracy or other unlawful means, is punishable with rigorous imprisonment from five years to life, or in cases of exceptional gravity, with death (1957, p. 77).⁹

In similar vein, the military state (derg) that overthrew Haile Selassie reiterated the legal protection of its power in its revised Special Penal Code in 1974. As Brietzke observes, article 3 of the 1974 Special Penal Code, concerning armed insurrections against the state and civil war, is identical to article 252 of the 1957 code (1982, p. 187).

In order to reaffirm its legitimacy, initially purported to be ordained by the divine power, the state in turn permits the printing of the words of the divine. For instance, in a preface to the first publication of the Amharic version of the Holy Bible in July 1955, Emperor Haile Selassie writes:

Ever since we were elected by Providence to rule our country, we have been providing our people with spiritual and intellectual guidance. ... Thus it is our wish that all our people should be enlightened with books. In this respect, through our royal instruction and permission we grant the publication of the Holy Bible in the twenty-fifth year of our rule. (Amharic extract of the preface in Ullendorff 1968, p. 68; translation mine)

It is noteworthy to echo here that the *Kibre Negest* was crafted with the collusion of the ruling Amhara Christian groups and the Orthodox Church seeking to legitimize the accession of a newly established royal (Solomonic) dynasty in 1270. The book

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

was completed in the fourteenth century incorporating different cultural and religious traditions. Its setting was the fourth century AD, and it was about a legend that was believed to have taken place 1,200 years earlier. Needless to say, most of the Ethiopian kings who ruled since the thirteenth century and who laid claim as Solomon's descendants, were not kith and kin at all. Most were unrelated by birth, and some were from entirely different ethnic groups and modest social backgrounds. Moreover, ruling kings never select their successors, and there had never been a systematically instituted royal succession in Ethiopian history. Hence, the ruling kings simply imprisoned their close royal family members (often for life) to avert any contention and conflict over power.¹⁰

In order to claim legitimate succession, many Ethiopian kings invariably had their coronation in the ancient city of Axum, even when it was farther away from their royal seats. Axum, as the ancient city of the early empire, still commands a symbolic power of state history, an 'origin' of Ethiopian state and 'national' identity, a historical reference point of permanence and continuity of the state. Moreover, a number of Ethiopian rulers have also assumed new royal names at their coronations, serial names which signify succession to reaffirm 'genuine' royal genealogy and continuity. For instance, Emperor Menelik II, whose reign ended at the turn of the twentieth century took his royal name after the legendary son of Queen Sheba and King Solomon – i.e., Menelik I. In similar vein, in 1930 Ras Teferi Mekonen selected a coronation name as Emperor Haile Selassie I with anticipation that his successors would assume the name by maintaining the Solomonic dynasty. Unfortunately, the Emperor's historical vision would never materialize since he was dethroned and his dynasty discontinued in September 1975. Nonetheless, Axum remains to command the attention of historians as the historical origin of the present nation and the state.

The ancient city of Axum with its remaining obelisks (many of them now in ruins) carries equal symbolic weight for the present minority political regime. The current ruling political group is composed of the elites of the northern Tigray ethnic region where Axum is located. Moreover, the Tigrean ruling elite resists the strong challenge from its political opposition in proving that it is not nihilistic towards Ethiopian history and the continuity of the state. Thus, in 2005 the current state diplomatically succeeded in persuading the Italian government to return the 1,700-year-old stele that had been looted by Italian colonialists in 1937. A project is now underway to re-erect the 78-foot obelisk in its original site in Axum, following a blessing from priests and a ceremony attended by senior state officials. A state project has also been initiated to restore the tallest fallen stele in Axum in a symbolic act of reanimating the ancient state.

The present discovery and recreation of history is often putatively identified with the past itself. More interestingly, in such discoveries and reconstructions of 'their' past, the modern Ethiopian states simultaneously record 'history' in the making.

In 1962, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) was established: the academic research areas covered by the Institute were history, art, and literature. And one year later the IES began publishing its scholarly journal, the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*. This period marks the development of history as an independent and fully-fledged discipline in state-controlled higher education in Ethiopia. This development was obviously welcomed by historians in a celebratory fashion, characterizing the IES as 'the national depository of Ethiopia' (Hable Selassie 1972, p. 11). The importance of

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

this Institute was recognized by historians with primary focus on the 'reconstruction of the past' (Hable Selassie 1972, p.1).¹¹

Ten years earlier, in 1952, the Ethiopian state established the Institute of Archaeology to pursue excavations systematically around Axum that had been begun by a German expedition in 1906. The 1906 German scientific expedition was led by Enno Littman and included members with a range of expertise in archaeology, paleography, ethnography, architecture, cartography, photography, and technical drawing. The primary aim of the expedition was to reconstruct Ethiopia's past history by excavating sites around the ancient city of Axum, in Northern Ethiopia. As John Michels notes, based on their initial findings the experts 'recognized the dramatic continuity in cultural forms between the Axumite past and the present' (1979, p. 3).

Between 1952 and 1974, each year the Ethiopian Archaeological Institute involved European experts in a perennial project designed to excavate the history of the ancient 'state' in and around Axum in the northern part of the country, thereby to establish unidirectional continuity from the subterranean state to the present state on the surface. Nothing provides clearer evidence of the state's quest for its own history – the material that has been uncovered and recorded is comprised primarily of relics such as palaces, thrones, crowns, royal tombs, coins, and epigraphic memorials. Some of the relics have been displayed in the state's National Museum in Addis Ababa and in the St Mary Church of Zion in the city of Axum since that period. Accordingly, it has always been taken for granted that the past is waiting for (re)discovery by historians and archaeologists who harbour a sensational urge to experience the past as well. The museum curators also have their own historical role in making the past contemporaneous and visible to the public.

Hable Selassie (1972, p. 11) classifies the historical evidence and documents for historians as 'primary sources' and 'secondary sources'. Accordingly, he listed inscriptions, coins, royal letters and decrees, and monuments under 'primary sources'. He characterized these fragmentary and limited 'primary sources' as 'authentic sources' (p. 11). The interpretation of these 'authentic sources' is left to the conflicting analysis and reinterpretation of historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists. On the other hand, he categorized traditional liturgical manuscripts and writings by travel historians as 'secondary sources'. Interestingly enough, many historians (including Hable Selassie) commit major methodological blunders in utilizing 'secondary sources' to authenticate or validate 'primary sources'. For example, it is not uncommon to see multiple references made to travel historians such as James Bruce and Henry Salt in history textbooks to substantiate 'primary sources' (see for example, Gasparini 1953, Mekuria 1959, Hable Selassie 1972, Taye 1972, Munro-Hay 1991). Therefore, the 'primary' nature of these historical sources should also be subject to critical examination. As Foucault maintains, 'the more one interprets the more one finds not the fixed meaning of a text, or of the world, but only other interpretations' (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p. 107).

In reading one of the epigraphic memorials first discovered by Conti-Rossini in 1896, three of the most renowned experts in the field had totally different interpretations of one of the ancient Sabeen inscriptions on the stelae. In 1913 Littman interpreted the ancient inscription as 'the ruler Agaz erected the monument in memory of the people of Aua-Alapho'; Ullendorf (1945) read it as 'the ruler Agaz conquered the people of Aua-Alapho'; whereas Drewes (1962) interpreted it as 'the

stele was transported by the ruler Agaz to a place called Aua-Ilpho'. To this day, there is neither a scholarly determination nor an indigenous confirmation as to which one of these translations of the inscription is accurate. There are no indigenous people who speak or understand the ancient Sabeian language in the Axum region.

The findings of the archaeological excavations were compiled by the Institute between 1955 and 1972 in an eight-volume special journal called *Annales d' Ethiopie*. Interestingly, the documentation of these relics illustrates what Foucault (1972, p. 7) observes comparing traditional and modern history: while traditional history 'undertook to memorize the *monuments* of the past', modern history 'transforms *documents* into *monuments*'.

The Ethiopian royal chronicles are one of the major primary historical sources of Ethiopian history. The earliest of the royal Ethiopian chronicles (discovered so far) was about King Amda Seyon, which was recorded in the fourteenth century during his reign.⁷ All of these royal chronicles were written in the old *Ge'ez* language by ecclesiastical scholars who were permanently attached to the palaces as scribes of the kings. The master trope of these chronicles features mainly the rulers and events such as their military conquests. The narrative focuses on the well-being of the monarchs, the victories of the kings in battle, and the legitimacy of their powers as both divinely ordained and rightful claimants of the Solomonic dynasty. These chronicles never indicate any of the kings' fallibility or lack of courage. As Hable Selassie notes:

The *tsehafte tizazat*'s (official chroniclers') main function was to write whatever the *azazh* (court principal) dictated. After that, they took the written chronicles to the emperor for approval. If there was something displeasing to the emperor, he could order a change. (Hable Selassie 1972, p. 2)

There is an ancient Ethiopian saying which illustrates the whims and wishes of the rulers: 'God cannot be blamed and the emperor cannot be criticized.' Indeed, 'historical truth' speaks in favour of power.

Yet, the uniqueness of each of these chronicles covers only the specific historical period of the ruling monarch. Each chronicle was separately recorded and was an independent historical text. But all the chronicles tacitly share the presupposition regarding the continuity of the royal dynasty. Each chronicle was a discrete historical record of a specific reign. Thus, as distinctly different from the chronicles, the chronological metanarrative of Ethiopian history refracting successive reigns of kings actually began in the late 1920s. The narrations are invariably organized around a linear timeframe, marking successive reigns from royal coronations to the deaths of kings.

It was the Italian historian, Conti-Rossini, who compiled the first chronological list of Ethiopian kings in his *Storia d'Etiopia* (1928). He compiled 86 different lists and reclassified them into eight categories. Other historians followed his example and prepared similar lists using different methodologies. As Hable Selassie (1972) indicates, each writer composes his own king-list such that each list is fundamentally different from others. Some compilations exhibit inconsistency and discrepancy, as well as sequential irregularity in terms of royal names; old names of regions; time-periods; overlapping reigns; and periodic gaps. Despite this lack of reliability, historians like Hable Selassie still consider the lists as indispensable secondary sources for no other reason than the historians' preoccupation with historical continuity. Hable Selassie (1972, p. 2) writes: 'The primary sources are very scant in

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

the ancient and medieval periods and the time span is immense. *Historical continuity will be impossible unless we use secondary sources like the lists* (emphasis mine). Similarly, another well-known Ethiopian historian, Tamrat (1972), affirms the paucity of documents as primary sources. Ironically he still claims to have a 'complete picture' of medieval Ethiopia from such 'scanty and isolated' historical data. In an introduction to his *Church and State in Ethiopia*, Tadesse Tamrat writes:

All my attempts to obtain other chronicles for this purpose during my short visits to Hayq, Gishan, Lalibela, Dima, Debre Worq, and some of the island monasteries of Lake Tana have been in vain. But I was able to gather a number of *small isolated notes*, particularly in the form of land grants, from early manuscripts of the Four Gospels. These notes have been of great help in forming *a more complete picture* of the medieval period, and they shed fresh light particularly on *the chronology of the kingdom*. (1972, p. 4, emphases added)

The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles which includes the abridged version of seventeen of the available chronicles was first published in English by Pankhurst in 1967. This was the first time that extracts of the discrete chronicles were edited and published in one volume in chronological order for the period that covers from the fourth century AD until 1913. Pankhurst's edition again exemplifies the historian's project which relentlessly attempts to establish the uninterrupted and continuous state history with unreliable and negligible sources *vis-à-vis* the long period it claims to represent. In Pankhurst's compilation, a few chronicles representing just seventeen rulers of different dominions with a combined reign of 400 years falsely renders a sense of long, continuous history of a unified territory lasting 1,500 years. Furthermore, we witness here what Foucault (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p. 118) calls the 'presentist fallacy'. Pankhurst in the preface of his book asserted:

The Aksumites appear to have developed a sense of history at a relatively early date. Several of the emperors followed the traditions of the Sabeans in recording their victories by means of inscriptions cut in stone. (1967, p. viii)

The inscriptions of the Axumite rulers may well have recorded their victories, coronations, and religious convictions. However, there is absolutely no indication, exemplifying any 'sense of history' on their part, in terms of recording the times of their predecessors for the purpose of demonstrating continuity and unity to their national identity and regimes. Hence, the 'presentist fallacy' in writing history occurs when 'the historian takes a model or a concept, an institution, a feeling, or a symbol from his present, and attempts – almost by definition unwittingly – to find that it had a parallel meaning in the past' (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p. 118).

Henceforth, the state historiography, elevating itself to a level of a monotony and repetition in substance and style, focuses on a familiar narration, of what Foucault (1972, p. 4) notes as 'the never-ending tracing back to the original precursors'. Conversely, the conventional historical methodology does not approve of 'discontinuity' in narrating a state-centred national history. As Foucault (1972, p. 8) further states: 'Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history.'

With the exception of very few, many contemporary scholars and students of Ethiopian history still use what Feierman (1995) calls 'a unicentric and unidirectional' metanarrative as representing the diverse social histories of the Ethiopian peoples. Even those who focus on writing a specific period invariably begin their long introduction with chronological narration of the state's long and continuous

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

history (Budge 1966, Greenfield 1965, Hess 1970, Lipsky 1962, Redden 1968, Schwab 1979). The recent works of Pankhurst on the social/cultural history of Ethiopia (1992) and the history of the polities in the borderlands (1997) attempt to incorporate non-state aspects of history. However, the paucity of documentary sources and the strong appeal to entrenched state metanarratives seriously limit his recent works. Pankhurst's *A Social History of Ethiopia* (1992) is a descriptive composition of marginal notes based on excerpts from state history books, excerpts which tangentially refer to social and cultural aspects of the people in the original works. His *The Ethiopian Borderlands* (1997) deals with polities of the peripheral regions while retaining the biographical sketches of local and central rulers. Moreover, Pankhurst's narration betrays the presupposition of a long continuous history (from 3500 BC to the nineteenth century) for different people and regions subsumed under the unitary Ethiopian state, a state which has centrally incorporated the peripheral regions only since the last decade of the nineteenth century. In this respect, there are a few exceptional recent works which focus on the social history of the people and the complex relationships between polities and centralizing powers (Gamst 1969, Donham and James 1986, Crummey 1986, Iliffe 1987, Zewde 1991, Hailemariam 1991, Tareke 1991, Tibebe 1995, and Ege 1996).

In addition to the state's claim of continuity in its history writing project, it also totalizes every aspect of the people's history. The social, economic and cultural aspects of the people's history are entirely reduced to the political history of *menegest*. One exception is the story of Christian saints (*gedle*) and their performance of miracles written by religious scribes. Yet most of these hagiographies also deal with political rulers to whom the saints were protégés. Hence, the metanarrative of Ethiopian state history excludes other forms of peripheral regimes such as small traditional polities; smaller tributary kingdoms; non-Christian religious orders such as Islam; subaltern groups; informal *shifta* (outlaw) power structures; and peasant rebellions. The 'history' of a rebellious Yodit (also known as Gudit) from a minority Agaw ethnic group was denounced and marginalized by Ethiopian historians for pillaging Axum and usurping the throne in the tenth century AD. The bias and inconsistency of many historians are obvious here as usurpation and pillage was the *modus operandi* of power struggle in ancient, medieval, and modern times in the region. The name 'Gudit' (meaning deviant) should have also been examined to establish whether it was indeed her name or an interpellation imputed upon her. Similarly, Ethiopian historians have been abrasive towards the Moslem ruler Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim (or Ahmad 'Gragne') who rose to power from the eastern central part of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century. His Ethiopian identity was always questioned and he was portrayed as the scourge of the nation; the historical claim is still contested that his territory (Adal) was located within the Ethiopian empire. As Feerman (1995, p. 59) notes:

The search for African narratives reveals that they are multiple narratives. It would be a mistake to give a privileged place to Ngoni royal narratives, or to the Kyungu's narrative, or to those of Ngonde nobles. There is no reason these should carry greater weight, or be accorded greater privilege, than Narwimba's own account, no reason the words of the Kyungu's rituals should count more than the words of subject women's rituals.¹²

The static *menegest* in Ethiopian history

The concept of the 'state' in Ethiopian history has always been signified by *menegest*, a term in the Amharic language which refers to a ruling centre. According to Aleqa

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Kidane-Wold Kifle (1956), *menegest* is a derivation of the term *neges*, which denotes the act of being a king, a ruler, as well as a locus of power, an embodiment of royal privilege, supremacy, and authority. All Ethiopian historians and political writers refer to Ethiopian kingdoms and empires of the past, as well as the modern state, as *menegest*. *Menegest* is a singular concept which identifies all state formations, rendering identical otherwise varied state forms. Moreover, the idea of *menegest* has also commanded – thanks to uncritical historians – an ontological figure in what Foucault (1972, p. 127) termed an ‘historical *a priori*’ to the extent of framing the perspective, style, and methodology of its history in a transhistorical fashion.

The concept of *menegest* as the state is used ahistorically in state historiography to refer to kingdoms and empires in ancient and medieval periods, as well as the modern Ethiopian states. It is insightful here to draw upon Wolpe’s critical remarks which illustrate the limitation of such a metanarrative in overemphasizing uniformity and continuity in South African history. He writes: ‘by imposing a uniformity on that history, it tends to suppress important questions about the nature and conditions of change in the society’ (Wolpe 1988, p. 6).

The contemporary Ethiopian state formations have to be differentiated formally and substantively from the earlier political centres. Conceptually, we must distinguish the modern state’s abstract authority from that of the earlier transparent power of individual rulers. Moreover, we have also to differentiate its relatively autonomous condensed site of social and power relations from other forms of societal relations upon which the state is imposed. Empirically, we have to identify its unique strategies and social basis in specific historical conjunctures. As the state develops a distinct identity and establishes relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* society, it occupies for itself a central space in contrast to other modes of association. The state’s hegemonic presence at the same time establishes its *raison d’etat* by identifying its purpose with that of the interest of society as a whole.

The modern Ethiopian state emerged from a traditional autocracy during the first decade of the twentieth century. Unlike many states in Africa, Ethiopian state formation developed on its own without a colonially imposed structure. Yet responding to European influence of modernization and progress, the Ethiopian Amhara ruling groups adopted a European state model. The ruling groups had also utilized European skills and knowledge by hiring expatriates during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Until the Italian colonial occupation in 1935, there were a total of 148 Europeans working for the Ethiopian state in various ministries as senior administrators, archivists, customs officials, accountants, auditors, engineers, doctors, legal advisors, school teachers, military trainers, pilots, and chefs (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, pp. 188–193). Moreover, during the same period there were 144 Ethiopian students who were sent to Europe on state scholarships (pp. 618–623). Upon completing their studies and returning from Europe, most of these educated Ethiopians were appointed as state ministers and senior state administrators. Modern education produced Ethiopian intellectuals who have ever since pursued careers as state functionaries. In the case of Ethiopia, whenever intellectuals join the state as functionaries, they tend to be wholly absorbed in day-to-day state administration (Zewde 1991, p. 109). Moreover, their occupational specialization in administering the population makes state functionaries collectively a distinct and relatively autonomous social group.

In 1908 six state ministers and several civil servants were appointed by Emperor Menelik II to the newly established ministries.¹³ Prior to this organizational and

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

administrative change, former traditional officials were personally responsible for consolidating all the functions of administrators, judges, military commanders, and feudal land owners in their respective dominions. As Bloch states in the case of feudal Europe, in the traditional Ethiopian power structure 'no clear distinction was made between the concrete image of the chief and the abstract idea of power' (1961, p. 410). Institutionalizing the organizational and administrative changes, Ethiopia's rulers passed a series of legislation and administrative rules which have simultaneously given shape to the emergence of the modern state in the period since the first decade of the twentieth century. The changes internally reorganized the institutional structure of the state, delineated administrative tasks and procedures, and set disciplinary mechanisms for internal cohesion. In relation to society, the changes clearly defined the role and the function of the state to administer the population and manage its economic resources. According to Article One of the first state constitution, all subjects of the state became collectively the Ethiopian population. Hence, as Foucault (1991, p. 100) observes of eighteenth-century Europe, population becomes the object of state administration, the goal of state power and knowledge in twentieth-century Ethiopia. Thus, according to Ethiopia's first constitutional arrangement, *menegest* (state), *he'zeb* (population), *ha'ger* (country), and *he'g* (law) *sui generis* were identified as one and the same under a unitary political system (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, p. 827).

In February 1908, through a centralizing judicial strategy, six judicial branches with twelve *wonbers* (justice chairs) were established under the Minister of Justice with specified jurisdictions for the country as a whole. For each justice chair, three judges and five clerks were appointed with specified hearing calendars, office hours, and work procedures such as recording of judgments. However, the source of civil and criminal laws was the traditional *Fitha Negest* (Justice of Kings) written in *Ge'ez*.¹⁴ The modern penal code was not officially adapted from the Swiss model until 1957.

A new centralizing state administration overseeing six regions was established under the Ministry of Interior in 1908. The Ministry was delegated with such tasks as census-taking and compiling census data, urban policing, as well as determining poll and property taxes. The administrative capital of the state at Addis Ababa city was established in the 1880s. It was selected on the basis of the historical belief that it was once the capital of a medieval ruler (Gebre-Selassie 1967). Thus the name Addis Ababa, which means 'new flower' in Amharic, was given as the new name of the capital city in lieu of its former Oromo name, *Finfine*. In reference to the old and new spaces of Southeast Asia, Anderson observes that renewed naming of places was intended to claim historical continuity. He writes: "'New" invariably has the meaning of "successor" to, or "inheritor" of, something vanished. "New" and "old" are aligned diachronically, and the former appears always to invoke an ambiguous blessing from the dead' (Anderson 1995, p. 187).

A centralized and uniform land-survey technique known as *qelad* was instituted by the state, both for land tax and state appropriation of excess land.¹⁵ A population census known as *hezeb qotera* was also taken, particularly among the peasants for income *geber* (state tax) purposes. A policy reform was also devised to change the tax structure into a progressive and uniform tax system. A centralized state budget was devised, itemizing for earmarked state expenditures.¹⁶ An administrative rule was implemented for the first time to differentiate between the personal property of the rulers and that of state revenues under the Ministry of Finance.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The organization of a professional standing army also began for the first time under a central command. Prior to this, armed peasant followers of different regional feudal lords constituted a highly fragmented military force. Accordingly, in 1910 a state-owned ammunition plant was established. To control the extent of fire-power in civil society, the state also required registration and licensing of gun ownership, as well as restricting the use of bullets as a medium in the transaction of goods.

Policing in Ethiopia was conceived as an urban watch system (*ye'arada zebegna*) and was established in the capital city Addis Ababa in 1912. The 3,510 watchmen were trained by Belgian officers and were deployed in ten stations in different parts of the city. Their duties included the establishment of sentry posts to maintain peace; responding to the hue and cry of the public; apprehending offenders; as well as investigating criminal cases. The watch system had a chief and a deputy chief, with various officers assuming a blend of traditional and modern rank titles, as heads of the ten stations. The urban watch had six specialized units with responsibility for criminal investigation, horse patrol, lock-ups, traffic control, intelligence, and as well as municipal sanitation.

The first modern school, named the Emperor Menelik School, and offering language courses in vernacular Amharic, French, Italian, Arabic and English, was opened in 1908. From this period onwards Amharic became the official language of the country. French was also used as a *lingua franca* for the emerging modern Ethiopian intellectuals until it was replaced by the English language in the 1940s (Zewde 1991, p. 108). Hence, the French cultural influence of the period made it possible for Alliance Française schools to be opened in Addis Ababa and Dire-Dawa in 1912. Until to this period, traditional education was monopolized by the church; the focus was religious and the liturgical ancient language of *Ge'ez* was used as the medium of instruction. In traditional Ethiopia, even letter writing was held in contempt as uncivil in the eyes of traditional warriors (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, p. 616). In order to reassure parents that sending children to school would be safe as far as their spiritual faith was concerned Emperor Menelik placed children of the aristocracy in the first secular school. Moreover, as a form of incentive, the state provided financial support and stipends to both parents and school children. During this period, in a policy recommendation to the state, an Ethiopian political economist who was educated in Germany strongly argued that education should of necessity be the keystone of a modern state since the people had to be enlightened and rational in order to be law-abiding, productive, and supportive of modernization (Baykedagne 1924, p. 125). As Zewde notes, modern education as the state project in Ethiopia had two purposes: 'The training of skilled personnel to staff the growing bureaucracy and the dissemination of ideas of change' (1991, p. 109).

In 1905 a permit was issued to a British bank to own and operate the Bank of Abyssinia as the first and only bank in the country. The bank was later bought by the Ethiopian state. The first Ethiopian national currency – the *birr* – was introduced in November 1908. Before the introduction of the *birr*, Ethiopians widely used a bar of salt, bullets, and Maria Theresa's Austrian silver as media of commercial exchange.

The Franco-Ethiopian Railway line from Djibouti to Addis Ababa was completed in 1908 mainly for external trade. It was jointly built and owned by the Ethiopian and French states. As Zewde observes, the railway 'became the chief

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

medium by which Ethiopia was drawn into the world economy' (1991, p. 101). Hence, during this period a need arose to legislate on banking; loan guarantors; trade corporations; investment; customs; transportation; and sales tax, with a view to regulating domestic and international commerce and investment. Thus this period marks the state *sui generis* as a newly emerging site of regulation for domestic and international capital.

The opening of diplomatic missions abroad, as well as subsequent membership of the League of Nations in 1923, led to a significant recognition of Ethiopia as a member of the international community of states. Ethiopia's international state boundaries (as we know them today) were gradually defined beginning in 1897 (with French and British Somaliland), and consummated in 1908 by territorial demarcations with British Kenya and Italian Somaliland (Zewde 1991, p. 113).

These legal, political, and administrative strategies contributed to the development and shaping of the modern central state as distinguished from previous political centres in Ethiopia. It was during this period that the state clearly and systematically identified its functions for effective governance of the populace. Hence, for the first time public and private spaces were clearly marked. Distinguishable from *elfegne* (private chambers) and *geber adarash* (banquet halls), where previously administrative and legal affairs were often conducted, separate office spaces were designated for each state ministry official to conduct the affairs of state. Daily office hours for all state ministries and public offices were clearly set in clock-calendar time for public services in what Tilly (1994, p. 277) identifies as the 'strong time of states'.

This period also witnessed the state's national-popular project, designed to foster national identity and citizenship by raising civic consciousness and disseminating history lessons through modern schools and the state-owned media. It is from this period onwards that history writing as state project was differently organized, whereby the old-style chronicles of individual rulers were displaced by chronological narratives of long, continuous state history in what Anderson (1995) called 'up time' fashion.

In 1906 the first printing machine was imported by the state. As one of the members of the ruling group reflects about that period, the printing press was highly acclaimed by the state as an indispensable vehicle for civilization *à la* Europe (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, p. 698). With the use of the printing press, the first state-owned daily *Aemero* (Rational Mind) began publication at the state press. This daily mainly carried state proclamations, decrees, and public notices. Subsequently, when a fully-fledged state printing press – *Berhan'ena Selam* (Light and Peace) – was established in December 1924, a number of books were published in vernacular Amharic under the auspices of the state (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, p. 698).

All books printed either in the state-owned press or privately commonly had notation of dates of publication under the reign of the given ruler; they also had prefaces highlighting how the benevolent and enlightened state leaders permitted the publication of the books. Before the introduction of the modern printing press, books were written in *qum-tsefet* (traditional calligraphy) by hand on leather scrolls. The calligraphers, the graphic artists, and the bookbinders were invariably members of the clergy, who were commissioned to work either at their private homes or at the royal courts. These traditional *literati* were often provided with sheep or goats depending on the volume and the number of copies they produced.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The scribes then used the hides to produce the scrolls and consumed the meat. One can assume that a skilful and prolific writer of the time could have been a well-fed, tenured, traditional scholar. This was how chronicles and manuscripts, prepared by clerical scribes commissioned under specific rulers, became important sources of Ethiopian history.

Towards a critical historiography

The unicentric and unidirectional state history of Ethiopia began to face serious challenges in the early 1970s. Ethnonational liberation movements demanded political independence from the central Ethiopian state in the Eritrea region of the North and the Oromo region in the South. These political movements justified their claims for self-determination on the grounds that the Ethiopian state is a colonial state of less than a 100 years old. Accordingly, ethnonationalist scholars and historians of Eritrean and Oromo origin began refuting the long history and unity of the Ethiopian state. Similarly, Eritrean ethnonationals refuted the historical claims that the present Ethiopian states are the extension and the direct descendant of the Axumite Empire (Habte-Selassie 1980, Sabby 1974). In the same vein, others dismiss the dominant narrative as myth (Haile 1988, Tseggai 1988, Tekle 1991). For instance, Tekle argues:

For almost a century, and particularly after World War II, Ethiopia has been the beneficiary of a colossal myth. Historians, politicians, adventurers and 'experts' have heedlessly legitimized a romantic but apocryphal epic as history. The saga, interweaving a lot of fiction with a little historical fact, depicts Ethiopia as 3,000 year-old with a glorious history and a rich cultural tradition. (1991, p. 15)

The challenge to Ethiopia's state history was simultaneously directed at the state that had long been dominated by Amhara ruling groups. In its 1977 political programme, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) aimed at establishing a free Eritrean state by abolishing the Ethiopian 'colonial state administration' in the region (1977, p. 23). The EPLF justified its aim and struggle for independence on the basis of the following refutation of Ethiopia's state history:

There is a legendary history of '3,000 years' which Ethiopian feudalists and rulers have fabricated to expand their interests. The principal objective of the Amhara feudalists in concocting this tale is the realization of their expansionist ambitions: to put a large country under this dictatorship through the claim of '3,000 years'. (1977, pp. 1-2)

The historical claims of Eritrean scholars trace 'Eritrean history' as far back as the Axumite kingdom in the first-century AD (Haile 1988), and even further back to 3000 BC, referring to an early Egyptian temple record on Eritrea (Tseggai 1988). Such counter-historical claims certainly run parallel to the 'unicentric' claims of the Ethiopian central state, for they propagate the same myth of continuity, unity, and immanence. It also understates heterogeneity in terms of cultural, regional, and social experiences. Eritrean scholars, such as Habte-Selassie (1980), note that Eritrea had been successively colonized by the Egyptians, Turks, Italians, and Amharas (Ethiopians). Non-Eritrean scholars also share this ethnonational historical claim that Eritrea had been a colony of the Ethiopian Empire since its annexation in 1961 (Cliff and Davidson 1988). After a long guerrilla war, Eritrea seceded from the Ethiopian state in May 1991 and became a single-party state under the EPLF. The United Nations admitted Eritrea as a member-state shortly after the formal

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

referendum of independence in 1993. The disintegrative effects of the dynamism of nationalism is well propounded by Anderson as follows:

Almost every year the United Nations admits new members. And many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalisms within their borders – nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day. (1995, p. 3)

Similarly, Oromo ethnonationalist scholars and activists still struggle for independence and claim they are colonized by Amharas as they have been in the last hundred years. Holcomb and Ibssa (1990), for instance, characterize Ethiopia's history simply as an 'Ethiopian colonial mythology'. They argue that 'the history of Ethiopia as it has been written by Ethiopianists up to the present has been written from a perspective which does not include the background to what is going on in the empire now' (1990, p. xv). Similarly, Hassan writes how the subjection of the Oromos by the Ethiopian state since the 1880s led to the suppression of their history in the officially-written state history. He writes:

The conquest and annexation of their territory not only deprived the Oromo of their sovereignty but also of their history, because the creation of the empire consolidated the myths and untruths long held and circulated in the Christian kingdom about the Oromo, who were generally portrayed as people without a history. (Hassan 1990, p. 1)

The Oromo ethnonationalists claim that Oromos, as the largest ethnic group in the Horn of Africa, have a long, independent history (Hassan 1990, Holcomb and Ibssa 1990, Jalata 1993). They make historical reference to a traditional Oromo socio-political system, known as the *gada*, which is claimed to be an egalitarian democratic system. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and sympathetic scholars to the Oromo cause base their claims of the state of Oromia's political history around the history of the *gada*, which has not been in existence among the Oromos at least for three generations. There had been regional differences in the structure of the *gada* system among Oromos of the South and Central Ethiopia (see Legesse 1973, Hassan 1990, Ege 1996). The *gada*'s organizing principle was generational and age-grouping with twelve hierarchical levels. Despite its characterization as egalitarian, the *gada* was a system that worked exclusively for male adults. Division of labour was organized in accordance with the different ages of its members. For example, a person would not be able to participate in the political decision-making until he reached level seven, that is, until the age of 40 years. Despite such independent historical claims of an ancient political system and social organization, all Oromo political organizations still have a democratic-centralist, Leninist party structure. Due to the change of state power in Ethiopia since May 1991, Oromos now believe that central Amhara ethnic colonialism has been superseded by Tigrean dominance from the North. The contention of the Oromos on Ethiopia's history is linked to the political strategy to establish an independent state of Oromia. One of the leading members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) summarizes the organization's objective:

The objective of the Oromo Liberation Front struggle is to enable the Oromo people to exercise their legitimate right of self-determination. This involves ending Ethiopian colonial rule – imposed on our people through armed conquest and sustained by force. (Ebba 1991, p. 47)

Most minority groups are located at the periphery of Ethiopia's power structure, and official history books are reticent about their marginalized historical experiences under the dominance of the central state. Nonetheless, the silence has been a mode of

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

power exercised by the ruling groups to exclude apparently with a representative national image. The marginalized groups are viewed as the 'other' Ethiopians, whose *dar ager* (peripheral) existence has known no representation at the centre (Donham and James 1986). These include minority ethnic groups such as the Maale, Dassanetch, Gumuz, Kwegu, Mursi, Gedeo, and Maji, among other people of southern and southwestern Ethiopia. Collectively referring to such subaltern groups, Donham writes: 'But another story remains untold, for there were many "others" who helped make twentieth-century Ethiopia. These other Ethiopians lived their lives mostly in the periphery rather than at the political centre' (Donham and James 1986, p. 3).

Similarly, until they were conquered by Emperor Menelik around 1886, such groups as the Guragues of central Ethiopia had an independent existence for more than 300 years (Hailemariam 1991, pp. 24–34). Like many other ethnic groups, the traditional administrative and legal system of the Guragues – the *Yejoka* – has been in use long since the incorporation of the region under the central state.¹⁷

The representational crisis in state history illustrates the exclusion of dominated groups both from history pages and from power-sharing. Hence, the propagation of the regime of truth in history writing and dominance in power relations mutually reinforce one another. In state history subaltern groups are discursively excluded by official historians. For instance, many of these historians propagate the myth that Ethiopia is the 'island of Christians', totally excluding Moslems and people of indigenous religious faiths (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, Gebre-Sellassie 1967, Taye 1972, Gebre-Yesus 1973). Aleqa Taye, in *The History of the Ethiopian People* (1972), writes that the dominant Semitic people of Ethiopia are 'so distinct from the people of Africa that they are called true human beings' (1972, p. 39).¹⁸ He also added that Amharic was historically selected as the state language, in contrast with other languages spoken in Ethiopia, since it was 'indigenous to the country'; and it was also preferable since 'Amharic is not hoarse to the vocal chord' (1972, pp. 50–51).

The compulsory use of an official language such as Amharic in education and state administration has been a powerful ideological vehicle for state domination and exclusion of subaltern groups. All textbooks are published in Amharic and school-age children cannot be enrolled in school unless they speak and write Amharic. Most importantly, all official businesses of state administration and the legal system are conducted in Amharic alone. Such an immense privilege of a single state language, in a country where at least 86 different indigenous languages with 200 dialects are spoken, exemplifies the asymmetrical power relations. Thus the challenge to Ethiopia's state history and unitary state also involves the defensible claim to use one's local language.

Similarly, Wolde-Mesqel argues that only Amharas have historical entitlement to land ownership since unlike other minority groups they have genuine social roots (1950, p. 113, translation mine). This assertion is not only exclusionary in the sense of marginalizing minority power groups from economic benefits and legal entitlement to land. It is also exclusionary in the sense of having social and national ties to their country since entitlement, ownership or usage of land historically carries a meaning of social membership in the community. In many regions of Ethiopia, land ownership is still socially defined as *atsme rist* – i.e., a genealogically established source of one's social roots. Otherwise, landless people or people who have been evicted from their land by force were left to be marginalized and socially uprooted.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

In February 1974 we witnessed a new strategy, a revolutionary strategy crafted with the promise to radically overcome both the representational crises reflected in power-sharing and social life under the 'truth' of history. The *Yekatit Abyot* [February Revolution] encompasses heterogeneous social movements whose radical *avant-garde* stance asserted the Marxist truism that it is the masses of the oppressed people who are the makers of real history in Ethiopia. Moreover, the leaders of these movements redefined a new revolutionary state purported to be truly representative of the working people and the peasantry of Ethiopia. As much as this strategy initiated a revolutionary break from the past, it simultaneously established that the revolutionary state supersedes its predecessors as the necessary phase of linear historical development. The revolutionary discourse of the 1970s dealt with the state's representational crisis as emanating principally from class oppression and exploitation of the working people by states of the former ruling feudal classes. However, the revolutionary strategy extended the representational crisis in a new and different form, a crisis which was uniquely manifested in state violence of the late 1970s. The left-tinged political forces were locked in a deadly combat to redefine a new revolutionary state in Ethiopia, a historical state defined exclusively in class terms and representative of the 'working masses'.

The representational crisis of the state and state historiography further continues under the current ethnically federated state, following the overthrow of the military state in May 1991. The core Tigrean ruling group since its inception in 1974 has upheld the political beliefs that Ethiopia has been historically the 'prison of nations and nationalities'. Thus, the organizing political principle of the newly-established ethnically federated state is recognition of the rights of nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. The preamble of the 1995 Constitution reaffirms the historical departure from the political past in this principle inscribed as: 'We, the nations, nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia...recognize that our common destiny needs to be based upon the rectification of historically distorted relationships and promoting common interests.' However, diverse political movements in the Oromo, Afar, Ogaden, and Gambela regions claiming secession still continue to challenge the sectarian and unrepresentative nature of this ideologically-constituted federal state.

Conclusion

A critical historian should study the history of this region beyond both unicentric and ethnonationalist perspectives. These perspectives tend to essentialize historical categories such as the state, nation, and ethnicity. They assume in both their claims and counter-claims their respective categories as transhistorical and static. For instance, the name 'Ethiopia' signifies different places and different people in the writings of ancient Greek historians or in the biblical references. Furthermore, the present territory has been widely (and officially) called 'Ethiopia' since the Second World War. Prior to that, names such as Nubia, Land of the Punt, Land of the Axumites, Land of the Habashats, and Land of the Abyssinians, have designated historically varying, overlapping regions in the northern and central part of contemporary Ethiopia, as well as those outside the present territory. Nor do these names historically signify the inclusion of ancestors of the people like the Oromos, Somalis, Gurages, Afars, etc. who are now incorporated into Ethiopian state territory. Furthermore, historical references to the past do not relate to southern polities which

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

were annexed by the empire at the end of the nineteenth century, and were subsequently incorporated by the central state. The traditional polities have not had the same populations, fixed territories, and immanent institutions throughout history. Nor has the state always been a highly centralized power. Present historians continue their attempts to project the composite features of the modern state onto the past.

Similarly, the counter-claims of ethnonationalists are problematic. For instance, in the region known as 'Eritrea' since 1890 there were smaller polities called Axumite, Bahre-Negash, Al Beja, Al Senar, and Baraka (Sabby 1974). This northern region had never been a unified political order or state until Italian colonization in 1890 (Sabby 1974). There are nine different ethnic groups integrated in the present Eritrean state. Yet, neither in contemporary historical accounts nor in power-sharing since May 1991 has the new Eritrean state been able to overcome the representational crisis.

I conclude my discussion with two observations regarding unicentric historical narratives: first, the anthropologist Abeles, who studied the Gamo people of Southern Ethiopia, notes that:

It should be concluded that the state could never be introduced by a decree: Any centralism imposed from outside should necessarily rest upon preexisting forms which could considerably restrict its real efficiency. (1981, p. 65).

Second, Feierman also provides interesting and important advice to the critical historian. He writes:

The need for historians to hear African voices originates with the same impulse as the need to hear the voices that had been silent within European history. Since that is so, it hardly feels satisfying to listen to a single authoritative African voice, leaving others silent, or to read African texts without seeing marks of power, or without asking about the authority of the historian (African or American, European or Asian) who presumes to represent history. (1995, p. 60)

Notes

1. Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria was a prolific historian with a vice-ministerial portfolio, responsible for the Ethiopian Archaeological Institute, state archive, museum, and public libraries.
2. Interestingly enough, the sequel excluded Emperor Haile Selassie; the military derg deliberately and selectively suppressed any historical reference to the emperor, except characterizing him negatively as the personification of the feudal past. Every single one of the emperor's memorials as hospitals, schools, statutes, roads, and theatres that he named after himself were erased (from memory *qua* history) at the early stage of the revolution in 1975.
3. It appears more than coincidental that under the current Tigrean-dominated federal state the first region as Kilel 1 (Federal Region 1) is numerically (hierarchically) reserved for Tigray in which the ancient city of Axum is located.
4. The emperor wrote two letters of commission in March 1905, a third letter in July 1906, and a fourth one in June 1907; copies of these letters are printed in Taye's *The History of Ethiopian People* (1972, pp. 13–16).
5. The emperor indicated in the preface that he had serious misgivings about the interpretation of his political life by other writers.
6. The Cuban historian Raul Valdes Vivo (1978) provided a glimpse of the life of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam as a revolutionary *par excellence*. The current regime has also

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

- published the biographies in the form of *gedle* (hagiographical style) of various political and student leaders as revolutionary martyrs in four volumes in 2000 and 2001. However, the biography of Meles Zenawi (the current prime minister) has not been written thus far.
7. The first English version of the *Kebre Negest* was published in 1922 with complete translation and introduction by E.A. Wallis Budge under the title: *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek*.
 8. This traditional painting of the royal legend is still popular and widely sold as a tourist item. One notices the 44 sequentially-arranged pictures with calligraphed captions narrating the story. The number of the pictures does not seem to me randomly selected. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has 44 saints; for each a church is commonly named and one calendric day is designated in honour of each saint.
 9. Interestingly, this first Penal Code was codified on the instructions of Emperor Haile Selassie I, the emperor who took power in a coup (then Ras Teferi Mekonen) from Emperor Menelik II's heir-apparent, Lij Iyasu, in 1916. Emperor Haile-Selassie, in turn became a victim of a military coup in 1974 and his royal (Solomonic) dynasty was terminated. Despite its attempt to legally protect the state's security under a similar revised new Penal Code, the revolutionary military state (derg) in turn was overthrown in May 1991. The current EPRDF state also imposes criminal sanctions against political opponents in accordance with the 1957 Ethiopian Penal Code until 2005; and in accordance with the recently revised Criminal Code since 2005. In particular, Articles 238 to 248 stipulate such offences against the state as 'outrages against the constitutional order'; 'obstruction of the exercise of order'; 'impairment of the defensive power of the state'; 'high treason'; and so on.
 10. The two well-known plateaus reserved for the royal prison were the *Gishen Amba* and *Weyhni* in northern Ethiopia (see Pakenham 1999). The famous novel *Rasselas: Prince of Abyssinia* (1962) by Samuel Johnson is a fictional work based on a story of an imprisoned Ethiopian prince in one of these royal prisons.
 11. The late Professor Hable Selassie was a lecturer on ancient and medieval Ethiopian history, first at the University College of Addis Ababa and later, from 1961, at Haile-Selassie I University.
 12. Here Feerman is referring to nineteenth-century oral history that he heard while conducting ethnographic research in East Central Africa. Ngoni and Kyungu are kinship groups and Narwimba is an African woman in the oral history.
 13. The twelve ministries established by royal decree (each having specialized functions) were the following: Justice, War, State Secretary, Interior, Finance, Commerce, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Pen (a modified modern version of the traditional imperial secretariat), Labour, Postal and Telecommunications, and Education (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, p. 60).
 14. The *Fiteha Negest* is a compendium of laws which has been used both by the kings and the Orthodox Ethiopian Christian Church for many centuries. The principal sources of the *Fitha Negest* are Roman-Byzantine laws, Syriaic laws, and the Old Testament. Four of the 52 chapters of the book deal with crime and capital punishment; a long chapter focuses on the administration of justice, particularly with regard to the responsibility and discretion of judges; a chapter specifically treats the moral offence of blasphemy; another chapter establishes the legitimacy and authority of the king. The book was originally written in Arabic by an Egyptian Copt intended for providing spiritual guidelines and administrative rule of justice for minority Christians in Moslem dominated Egypt in the thirteenth century. The book is believed to have been translated in the liturgical *Ge'ez* language in the fifteenth century and has been in use in Ethiopia ever since. Members of the clergy have been *Fitha Negest gelachoch* (readers and interpreters of the law book) in imperial justice courts. The book was published both in *Ge'ez* and Amharic in 1966, and it was translated into English with a foreword by Abba Paulos Tzadua in 1968.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

15. *Qelad* is a measuring unit approximately equal to 66.5 metres in length.
16. A monthly budget was apportioned for itemized state expenditures as follows: 45% for the military, 10% for public infrastructure; 10% for the church and clergy; 10% for salary; 8% for material procurement, 5% for a reserve fund, and 12% for public savings (Wolde-Mesqel 1950, p. 205).
17. *Yejoka* is an assembly area of the Guragues where administration, as well as implementation of law and punishment for offences, take place (Hailemariam 1991, 35).
18. As a historian, Aleqa Taye is widely acclaimed by educated Ethiopians as the 'father of Ethiopian history'. He was also a linguist in both *Ge'ez* and Amharic, whose linguistic scholarship gave him the opportunity to go to Germany under Emperor Menelik's Ethiopian state scholarship in 1905.

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Modernity, Eurocentrism, and radical politics in Ethiopia, 1961–1991

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This article provides a critical reflection of radicalism in Ethiopia in the thirty years from 1961 to 1991. Radical politics among Ethiopians, both at home and abroad, grew out of the global radicalization of the 1960s. Radicalism in Ethiopia took one form: Marxism. The article highlights three main points. First, unlike any other place in the history of revolutions, Ethiopia went through *three simultaneous revolutions* during the 1974–1991 period: those in Eritrea, Tigray and Ethiopia at large. Second, almost all the military conflicts that consumed hundreds of thousands of lives in the country were conducted among political forces that were Marxist, or Marxist-oriented. Third, Marxism was deeply embedded in the Eurocentric structure of knowledge. Ethiopian Marxism by extension was Eurocentric in its grasp of the Ethiopian situation. It rejected Ethiopia's past as being one reactionary pile of refuse badly in need of cleaning. The paper presents a critical reflection of this Eurocentric paradigm.

This article attempts to present a critical reflection on the most dominant political force in Ethiopia during the period 1961–1991: Marxism. It contrasts the Eurocentric limits of Ethiopian Marxism with that of the Ethiopian 'organic' intelligentsia that grew out of Ethiopia's traditions. It also reflects on the rise of liberalism among a large sector of the Ethiopian intellectual elite. It closes with a plea for a 'return to the source' of Ethiopia's multiple traditions informed by what I call 'communal democracy'.

Long-term, large-scale organized revolt against Haile Selassie's regime began at the northern and southern ends of the Ethiopian Empire. On 1 September 1961, Hamid Idris Awate fired the first shot at Mount Adal, Eritrea, sparking the 30-year-long Eritrean Revolution. In July of the previous year, young Eritrean students living in Cairo, Egypt, formed the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). All the founders of the ELF, and Hamid Idris Awate who was not among the founders of the ELF, were Muslim. At the southern end of the Empire, Somali Muslims in the Ogaden and Oromo Muslims in Bale duplicated the Eritrean revolt against the hegemony of the Christian Empire. It was no accident that these revolts were begun by Muslims, who were second-class subjects of the Empire. Later non-Muslims around the Empire joined the struggle which ended in the break-up of Ethiopia into two states in 1991, Ethiopia and Eritrea. The period 1961–1991 marks the *generation of revolutions* in

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

modern Ethiopian history. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Eritrean Revolution was the 'king-maker' of all the other revolutions in the rest of Ethiopia. This small ex-Italian colony played a hegemonic role in the development of radical politics in Ethiopia during 1961–1991. In a way, it still has a political weight over the region well beyond its power and means.

Let us now turn to the theme of the article: radicalism in Ethiopian politics, 1961–1991.

Marxism in Ethiopia

On 25 February 1965, in the fifth year after the 1960 abortive coup, Haile Selassie I University students demonstrated in front of the parliament invoking, 'Land to the Tiller' (Tadesse 1993, p. 39). Although the call for land to the tiller is not by itself Marxist, it later became the cornerstone of the Marxist movements in Ethiopia. In May 1991, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) triumphed over the Ethiopian government. Although EPRDF came out of the Marxist movement and its Marxist core, the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray, praised the Albanian brand of Marxism, it ceased to officially identify itself as Marxist by the time it seized state power on 28 May 1991. In the global context of the end of the Cold War and its eagerness to be embraced by the West, the EPRDF shied away from openly espousing Marxism. There is still some leftover Marxism in EPRDF's politics, though. Its policy regarding the 'national question' is an example of this leftover Marxism.

Marxism came onto the Ethiopian political scene in the context of the global radicalization of the 1960s. It consolidated its political foothold in the 1970s, and began its precipitous downward spiral in the 1980s. In 1991, it lost its hegemony in Ethiopian politics.

In order to assess the history of radical politics in Ethiopia, including Marxism, we need to delve into the politics of resistance against Haile Selassie's autocracy. The first organized attempt to get rid of the emperor from power was the 1960 abortive coup against Haile Selassie's government. This coup was a turning point in modern Ethiopian politics. It was the spark that ignited the fire of student radicalism. There was also the radicalizing influence of African scholarship students attending Haile Selassie I University (Balsvik 1985).

Symbolized by the alliance of General Mengistu Neway (let us call him *Qadamawi* Mengistu, Mengistu I) and his American-educated intellectual brother Germame Neway, the coup was to be a beginning of an alliance between radicalized soldiers and young intellectuals. University students supported the coup makers. Fourteen years later, there was the second coming of Mengistu. Mengistu Haile Mariam (let us call him *Dagamwi* Mengistu, Mengistu II) picked up from where Mengistu I had left off. Once again, students supported the radicalized soldiers' movement against the imperial order. In between the two Mengistus, a radical and formidable political culture engulfed Ethiopia: the Ethiopian Students Movement (hereafter ESM).

Marxism in Ethiopia is a product of the ESM. The ESM was the most radical student movement in Africa influenced by Marxist ideology. It was also one of the most radical in the world. Its radicalism was on par with that of the Iranian students. Its various spectrums and shades stemmed from a sympathetic encounter with Marxist theory.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The ESM was the drum-beater announcing to the larger world the injustice of Ethiopia's agony; it was the voice of the voiceless. It echoed the age-old grievances of the Ethiopian poor. The ESM translated the peasant lamentation, *daha tabadala*, *feteh taguadala* (the poor are mistreated, justice is trampled upon) into the call, *maret laarashu*, *tawagulat attesheshu* (land to the tiller, fight for it without retreat). The peasant call for revolt, *teragn chakaw teragn duru*, *lantem yeshalhal betcha kamadaru* (call me the forest, call me the bush, for it is better for you to have company for the night), was rendered *fano tasamara*, *fano tasamara*, *enda Ho Chi Minh enda Che Guevara* (guerrillas, fan out like Ho Chi Minh, like Che Guevara). It is important to keep in mind that some of the most prominent leaders of the many shades of the ESM that later grew into many Marxist political parties were of peasant or countryside background. They grew up witnessing first-hand the misery of the peasant world, including, in some cases, their own families. To cite but a few, of the top five leaders of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP, EHEAPA in Amharic), three were from the countryside: Tesfaye Debesay and Zeru Kishen (both from Tigray), and Berhane Maskal Reda (from Wallo); Haile Fida, the leader of the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM, MEISON in Amharic) was from Wallaga; Wallelgne Makonnen was from Wallo.

Still, most of the student activists were from major urban centres, primarily Addis Ababa. They had no lived experience of peasant life. I wonder if many of these activists had even left Addis Ababa to witness peasant life a few kilometres outside the city, say in Sandafa or Sululta.

The ESM, at home and abroad, contained two broad perspectives, sometimes colluding, other times colliding, in assigning primacy to the Ethiopian predicament. The first perspective saw the fundamental question in Ethiopia as being a class question. According to this view, in order to solve all other pertinent questions that engulfed Ethiopia – national, religious, gender, etc. – the class question needs to be solved first. Once the class question is solved, the other issues will find their appropriate solutions as a result. This 'trickle-down' theory was followed by what later became the two prominent multinational Marxist organizations, the EPRP and AESM, alongside other minor ones. The other position advocated the view that Ethiopia is primarily a prison of nations and nationalities (comparable to Czarist Russia) suffering from Amhara domination, and that unless and until this question is tackled head on and solved first, all the other questions, including class, gender, etc., will not and cannot find their proper solution. In this view, the solution to the national question is the unconditional acceptance of the right of nations to self-determination, including secession. All nationalist movements espoused this perspective, including the ELF, EPLF, Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), to cite but the main protagonists. From May 1991 to the present, it is this second perspective that has been calling the shots in Ethiopian politics. This view was challenged most recently by Qenejet (Kinjit) during the May 2005 elections.

There were two perspectives within the national-question-comes-first group: those who saw the national question as being primarily *national*, so that it could find its solution within Ethiopia; and those who saw it as a *colonial* question, whose solution required the independence of the region in question. Those who believed in the colonial thesis were in main the Eritrean, Oromo, and Ogaden nationalists organized in the ELF/EPLF, OLF, WSLF (now Ogaden National Liberation

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Front), respectively. They saw Ethiopia as a colonial empire and their struggle as an anti-colonial struggle.

The TPLF identified its struggle as a *national* question, not a colonial one, which meant its solution could be found within Ethiopia. Still, the TPLF once toyed with the idea of establishing an independent Tigray (Berhe 2005). The TPLF, however, supported the Eritrean nationalist claim that the Eritrean question is a colonial question. The multinational Marxist parties like EPRP and AESM accepted in principle the right of nations to self-determination, including secession. They nevertheless advocated class unity across ethnic lines. Overall, it may not be far from the truth if we were to say that the national question was the central question in the Marxist movements in Ethiopia (Balsvik 1985, p. 285).

Corresponding to the colonial, national, and class questions articulated by the various Marxist movements, three respective revolutions took place in Ethiopia: the Eritrean revolution that was begun in 1961 by the ELF and achieved its goal of Eritrean independence in 1991 (*de facto*), and 1993 (*de jure*); the Tigrayan revolution that began in 1975 with the formation of the TPLF and culminated in EPRDF's capture of power in 1991; and the 1974 all-Ethiopian revolution. No country in the history of revolutions has gone through such turmoil of *three simultaneous revolutions*, especially one that happens to be one of the poorest in terms of material wealth.

Two anomalies stand out in the Ethiopian Marxist episode in the aftermath of the February 1974 Ethiopian revolution, as compared with other world revolutions. First, the ruling class of the old regime collapsed without putting up a fight. Let me cite an anecdote. Ryszard Kapuscinski begins his book, *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat* (1984), with a story told to him by one of his informants. The emperor used to have a Japanese-breed dog called Lulu. The informant stated that Lulu

was allowed to sleep on the Emperor's great bed. During various ceremonies, he would run away from the Emperor's lap and pee on dignitaries' shoes. The august gentlemen were not allowed to flinch or make the slightest gesture when they felt their feet getting wet. I had to walk among the dignitaries and wipe the urine from their shoes with a satin cloth. This was my job for ten years. (Kapuscinski 1984, p. 5)

Such took place in a country where the overwhelming majority of the people walked without shoes. It was this ruling class that crumbled without a fight to defend its class interest. The little fight it put up came after the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, and it was feeble, sporadic, and of short duration. With the removal from power and imprisonment of the emperor and the most high-ranking officials, the sporadic revolts that broke out here and there, especially by the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), had no stomach for a sustained 'white' counter-revolution. The Derg, the TPLF, and the EPRP, separately engaged and finally phased out the EDU from the political scene. The EDU was the first organized genuine counter-revolutionary movement in the history of revolutionary Ethiopia. For that, it has a special place in the annals of the history of counter-revolution in Ethiopia.

The second anomaly is that the armed conflicts in the post-Haile Selassie era were primarily among the various Marxist movements themselves. Unable to find 'genuine' and formidable 'white' counter-revolution, the Marxist movements turned on each other, projecting the non-existing white counter-revolution onto their Marxist opponents. These Marxist movements engaged in merciless campaigns of

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

mutual defamation, recrimination, and dehumanization, labelling each other all kinds of names: anarchist, secessionist, fascist, chauvinist, narrow nationalist, anarcho-fascist, etc.

Marxism in Ethiopia was *episodic* – that is, it came suddenly into the Ethiopian political scene; and it disappeared as suddenly as it appeared. The Marxist episode in Ethiopia did not grow to establish an intellectual tradition. It lived its short lifespan as *chingaf* Marxism (infant Marxism) and died away. It was event-driven, and event-impressed. Events, as Hegel and Braudel remind us, are dust. As dust, they quickly pass into the dustbin of history. The torrential Marxist rain that once flooded Ethiopia had passed into history. Enter now another torrential rain, liberalism. Those who once preached the ‘scientific truth’ of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse-Tung’s thought are now steadfastly echoing the catchphrases of the globalization paradigm.

I said that Marxism in Ethiopia was episodic and died in its infancy. Why? I suspect there are two main reasons for the poverty and sterility of Marxism in Ethiopia. The first is time. There was only half a decade between Marxism being accepted as the theoretical guidance of the ESM, and the outbreak of the 1974 Revolution. It was in 1969 that the ESM *inside* Ethiopia accepted Marxism as its ideological guide. Five years later, in February 1974, Ethiopia had its revolution. No country, not to mention Ethiopia, could produce a sophisticated Marxism in such a short time period. During the process of the revolution itself, Ethiopian Marxists’ time was consumed by revolutionary action, not elaboration of Marxist theory. Although the leaders of the Marxist movements paid lip-service to the importance of having the ‘correct’ theory to guide to the ‘correct’ action, prime urgency was given to revolutionary action. For one thing, it is easier to engage in revolutionary action, provided one is committed to the ‘cause’, than the long period of gestation that production of theoretical knowledge requires. Those Ethiopian Marxists who lived in exile, many of whom became prominent leaders of the many Marxist movements at home in the post-1974 period, had more time for Marxist theoretical production before rather than during the revolution. Between 1974 and the withering away of the Marxism in the 1980s, infighting was endemic in the relationship among the various Marxist movements.

The second reason is the dearth of material in Marxist literature inside Ethiopia. Even though the Marxists in exile in the West had access to an abundant supply of Marxist literature, their theoretical production was unimpressive.

In the short history of the Marxist bubble in Ethiopia, the most authoritative work in Ethiopian Marxism is a 115-page brochure written by Addis Hiwet entitled, *Ethiopia: from Autocracy to Revolution*. The Review of African Political Economy published it in 1975. Hiwet opens this brochure with following paragraph:

The deep-seated myth that has for so long enshrined Ethiopia – both the name and the country – still blurs genuine historical understanding. Ethiopia’s existence as a ‘modern state’ does not – as the ideologists of the *ancien regime* claim – extend beyond the 1900s and into the limitless and ever-remote millennia. The same historical forces that created the ‘Gold Coast’, the Sudan and Kenya, were the very ones that created modern Ethiopia. And recognition of this fact makes modern Ethiopia no older than these African states. What makes Ethiopia’s creation as a ‘modern state’ formally different is the way the same historical forces evolved. (Hiwet 1975, p. 1)

The above citation contains the seed of the argument of the whole brochure. I do not intend to engage with a critique of Hiwet’s brochure here. Suffice it to mention that

contrary to Hiwet's allegation, no ideologue of the *ancien regime* made the claim that Ethiopia's existence as a *modern* state extends into the 'ever-remote millennia'. Hiwet does not cite a single source to back up this claim. Emperors Tewodros II and Menelik II stated Ethiopia's 'backwardness' and its lack of modernity. It was this understanding that made them search for European allies to help the modernization of Ethiopia. What the ideologues of the *ancien regime* stated regarding Ethiopia's existence as a state was not *modern* Ethiopia, but *historic* Ethiopia. A Marxist intellectual who supposedly knows the 'objective laws and stages of social development' should have been able to notice that easily.

I surmise that the most important theoretical insight of Hiwet in *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* is his analysis and description of what he called 'military-feudal colonialism', the expansion south of Emperor Menelik's campaign of *agar maqnat*. Space prevents me from delving deep into this most important aspect of the history of modern Ethiopia. Suffice it to say that in this regard, there are three perspectives – what I call the 'three faces of Emperor Menelik'. The first view is of those from Northern Ethiopia, primarily Tigray and Eritrea, who see Menelik as a traitor, impelled by narrow power considerations, who committed national treason by actively undermining Emperor Yohannes' struggle to ward off Italian colonial aggression. He accepted the legitimacy of Italian sovereignty over a part of historic Ethiopia, Eritrea, by signing the Treaty of Wuchale in 1889. The second perspective is that of those who see in Menelik one of the greatest leaders in Ethiopian history, the hero of Adwa and the man who presided over the 'reunification' of Ethiopia. They called him 'Emiye Menelik' (Mother Menelik) – a term of endearment. These two views, although different from each other, stem from the same ideology of *Ityopyawinat* (Ethiopian nationalism). The third view is quite different from the previous two. It is a perspective that sees Menelik as a black colonialist, one who participated in the European scramble for Africa by conquering with brute force the territory and peoples of what later became Southern Ethiopia. This is the view entertained by a significant sector of the Oromo, Ogadeni, Sidama intelligentsia and so on. It is also a view held by many Marxists from the dominant Amhara-Tigray power bloc.

Soon after the publication of *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*, Hiwet produced a follow-up piece entitled, *From Revolution to Bourgeois Dictatorship*. Its theme was the triumph of 'Bonapartism' in the Ethiopian revolution. Not heeding Marx's warning in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* against 'superficial historical analogies', Hiwet saw the Derg as a Bonapartist 'bourgeois dictatorship'. The case is argued by analogy with the French Revolution. The Ethiopian Revolution, like that of the French Revolution, was bourgeois-democratic. As the French Revolution resulted in dictatorship, that of Napoleon Bonaparte, i.e., Bonapartism, so did the Ethiopian Revolution.

After a dozen years of silence, Hiwet wrote a paper for the Second International Conference on the Horn of Africa held in New York City in 1987. In this piece titled, 'A Certain Political Vocation: Reflections on the Ethiopian Intelligentsia' (1987), Hiwet critiqued Hagos Gebreyesus's article, 'The Bankruptcy of the Ethiopian "Left": Meisone-EPRP, A Two-Headed Hydra: A Commentary on the Ideology and Politics of National Nihilism'. Gebreyesus (1980) presented this article for the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held at Nice, France in 1977. It was re-submitted at the 1987 New York Conference. Gebreyesus himself was not present

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

at this conference. Hiwet called Gebreyesus a 'sort of godfather (no sarcasm here) of the student movement' (1987, p. 41). The 'godfather' was 'vindictive, revanschist [*sic*] and, to borrow his own term and, we believe, applying it scrupulously, nihilist' (Hiwet 1987, p. 41).

At the same New York Conference, Melakou Tegegn, once a high-ranking EPRP leader, presented a paper entitled 'EPRP: A Historical Background and a Critical Assessment of its Experiences' (1987), in which he also criticized Hagos Gebreyesus. According to Tegegn, Gebreyesus 'has miserably failed to display an objective approach towards the assessment of the experiences of the Ethiopian left, the EPRP included' (1987, p. 99). Like Hiwet, Tegegn calls Gebreyesus's view expressed in his article cited above 'vindictive'. Why was Gebreyesus 'vindictive'? Tegegn tells us that it had to do with Hagos being 'paranoid of the Ethiopian left that castigated him in 1970 as social-chauvinist for his position on the national question' (1987, p. 99). In the Marxist language of the ESM, a social chauvinist is one who appears socialist but is actually chauvinist. Tegegn questions Gebreyesus's ability to judge the situation in Ethiopia as by then Gebreyesus had 'resigned from the student movement as early as 1971 and has never taken part in any revolutionary movement since'. As a result, Gebreyesus's 'knowledge about the post-February (1974) left is indirect and incomplete'. Indeed, 'If Hagos positively displays anything at all in this respect [of analysis of the Ethiopian situation and the left in general] it is his blunt approach that can be summarized as: how not to assess the Ethiopian left' (Tegegn 1987, p. 99).

If not being active in the student movement, and not being on the ground in Ethiopia during the outbreak of the revolution, was what made Gebreyesus's approach to the Ethiopian left wrong, what was EPRP's grasp of the Ethiopian situation, given that EPRP militants were on the hot ground of Ethiopian politics, unlike Gebreyesus who was hibernating in the Canadian cold? Tegegn informs us that EPRP had difficulty in 'correctly' understanding the nature of the regime it was fighting to overthrow:

One of the basic weaknesses of the EPRP is that it hasn't presented any analysis of the characteristics of the military regime [the Derg.] Although it has unceasingly referred to it as fascist, repressive, dictatorial and with all sorts of political adjectives that describe a murderous regime, it has however failed to make a scientific characterization of the regime. (Tegegn 1987, p. 107)

Tegegn tells us that EPRP lined up its devoted troops for war against a government whose nature it was unable to 'scientifically' understand. Tegegn goes on to provide a detailed account of the other mistakes and blunders of the EPRP, including the urban warfare in which EPRP committed 'suicide' (1987, p. 111). It seems that Gebreyesus, who 'resigned' from the ESM in 1971, and who was not on the ground in Ethiopia during the revolution, had a better grasp of the realities, including the Derg, which he simply called 'military dictatorship', than the EPRP. History vindicated the 'vindictive', i.e., Gebreyesus. With the hindsight of historical reflection, we can see that Gebreyesus 'resigned' from student politics *at the right time*, when student politics was transcended by party politics. In 1972, one year after he 'resigned' from student politics, the EPRP was formed.

One of the seminal events in the Marxist episode in Ethiopia is a four-page paper written by a fourth-year political science undergraduate student at Haile Selassie I University, Walleigne Mekonnen. Its title was 'On the Question of Nationalities in

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Ethiopia'. It was published on 17 November 1969 in the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) journal (Mekonnen 1969). This piece is considered the salvo that sounded the opening of the debate on the national question in the ESM. In the first paragraph, Mekonnen states that the 'main purpose of this article is to provoke discussions on the "sacred", yet very important issue in this country – the Question of Nationalities' (1969, p. 4). He knew quite well that he was on the path of the 'sacrilegious', daring to make a call for an open critical discussion about *Ityopyawinat* (Ethiopian nationalism). He further states that the article 'suffers from generalizations and inadequate analysis'. Still he felt that 'it is not mediocre but a beginning' (Mekonnen 1969, p. 4). I do not intend to analyse or critique Mekonnen's article here. My intention rather is to reflect on the *ethical* issue of Mekonnen's place in modern Ethiopian history, on what could be called *Walleligne Mekonnen's provocation*.

I see Walleligne Mekonnen as the metaphor for the dedication of Amhara Marxist radicals who charged the Amhara ruling class as the culprit for the oppression of non-Amhara nationalities. It was not his fault that his four-page call for the deconstruction of the dominant Amhara power structure remained unelaborated, unexamined, unexplored, and unresearched. Tilahun Takele (pen name of two EPRP leaders) enlarged on Mekonnen's pages, but more pages did not bring better articulation. Mekonnen condemned the old order, and rendered the judgement: 'Guilty of national oppression in the first degree!' Mekonnen, the advocate of *land* to the tiller, died in the *air*.

Let us engage in some reflection as to what it was that was prompting Mekonnen's conscience. Was it that as a transnational hero he saw the non-Amhara 'others' as himself and cried out loud for justice for them? Or was it that he saw the Amhara ruling class oppression of 'others' as the extension of the oppressive relation that existed between the Amhara ruling class and the Amhara *zega* (subject)? Did he see as impossible the liberation of the oppressed and exploited Amhara masses without the liberation of oppressed nationalities? From whatever angle we may ponder and reflect on this young Walloye's passion, his was an admirable courage and dedication to see social justice in Ethiopia. Many are called for making mistakes, but few are 'chosen' for heroism in fighting for social justice. Mekonnen was among the 'chosen' few. In a way, Walleligne Mekonnen was the Amhara version of the nineteenth-century white American hero who gave his life fighting against slavery, John Brown.

To deny Walleligne Mekonnen's heroism is to deny the sacrifices of thousands of Amhara youth who gave their lives in the fight for what he stood and died for. It is a sad irony of our recent history that the Amhara youth who were consumed in the fire of the Ethiopian revolutions are considered traitors, at worst, and naïve, at best, by many of their ethnic peers, while many of those for whom they died downplay their martyrdom, highlighting their inability to overcome their Amhara 'chauvinism'. It is time that we appreciate their bravery, their compassion for the downtrodden and, most importantly, their transcending of their Amhara identity to be one with those who were considered rude and uncivilized.

Ethiopian Marxism had a shallow grasp of Marxist theory. Still, it was full of Marxist terminologies, mostly combative and directed against other Marxists. All the cantankerous labels one could think of were there: Trotskyite, revisionist, opportunist, infantile leftist, right and left deviationist, etc. It was in part from this

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

cantankerous culture that the mania for hyperbole engulfed the political vocabulary of Marxist revolutionaries. One example is the EPRP's declaration of the triumph of fascism in Derg Ethiopia. How, one may ponder in bewilderment, is it possible for a supposedly fascist government to help translate Marx's *Capital* into Amharic, abolish landlordship and make land available to the peasantry, ally itself with the socialist camp, train guerrilla fighters for Zimbabwe, open offices for the Palestine Liberation Organization, and introduce massive literary campaigns in fifteen languages, to cite but a few examples? Stalinism would have been a better label to closely describe the Derg, but that would have implicated virtually every Marxist movement in Ethiopia, including the EPRP itself. *The only period of fascism in Ethiopian history was during the Italian occupation of 1936–1941*. One of the most accomplished Marxist historians of the twentieth century wrote, 'Fascists were the revolutionaries of counter-revolution' (Hobsbawm 1994, p. 117). What 'revolution of counter-revolution' did the Derg carry out?

The most important question regarding the Marxist episode in Ethiopia is this: why were there so many Marxist organizations in a country whose Marxism was so skin-deep? Why was it that the fight was not between the revolution/counter revolution camps, but rather among the Marxist revolutionaries themselves? That every Marxist organization calls other Marxist organizations 'counter-revolutionary' is without merit in light of the history of world revolutions. It was mere hyperbolic exuberance. The EPRP called the AESM '*banda*', to make the analogy with those Ethiopians who allied themselves with the Italian fascist occupiers of the country during 1936–1941. As the Derg was fascist, anyone who works with it was by definition '*banda*'. The AESM was not short of labels, either. It called the EPRP 'anarchist', 'fascist', 'terrorist', etc., throwing back at the EPRP much of what the EPRP said of it. How the EPRP, a party fighting for state power, could be anarchist is as unintelligible as the EPRP calling the Derg fascist and the AESM *banda*. The AESM name that sticks the most about the EPRP was 'anarcho-fascist'. The MALERID (Amharic acronym for the Marxist Leninist Revolutionary Organization), Waz League, Itcaht, and Seded all called the EPRP 'anarcho-fascist'. The Derg and its allies used the term *gelgel* fascist (young fascist) to describe the EPRP, while the EDU was seen as some kind of *abat* (father fascist). That way, the Derg and its allies painted the EPRP and EDU as the child and parent of fascist counter-revolution. It was as if everybody were fascist. The word 'fascist' was the most favoured word used by Marxists to label each other.

Ethiopia's Judeo-Christian culture is full of *ergeman* (condemnation), and *mesgana* (praise). This may explain in part the craze for condemning one's opponents, and glorifying oneself. Tolerance of differences was anathema among the different Marxist organizations. The irony is that at the eleventh hour, when the 'fascist' Derg was on its last legs, and the EPRDF was closing in on Addis Ababa and the EPLF on Asmara, the EPRP and AESM, the two prominent Marxist organizations that suffered the death and destruction of thousands of their members at the callous hand of the Derg and each other's campaign of terror, accepted the Derg's call for a united front against the 'enemies of Ethiopia', the EPRDF/EPLF duo. Soon after the fall of the Derg, they jointly formed an organization in exile called the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (Qenejet, in short). *Jeb kaheda wusha chohe* (the dog barked after the hyena left). Ethiopia could have taken a different path had the two prominent Marxist organizations reconciled their

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

differences earlier. It is ironic that the most powerful political movement to challenge the EPRDF's rule in the 2005 elections took the name Qenejet, while those of the first Qenejet took the name Hebrat (unity). Qenejet I (*Qadamawi* Qenjet) saw Qenejet II (*Dagmawi* Qenjet) as *qagn-* (right) oriented for their uncritical appropriation of the ideology of neo-liberalism.

To properly understand the place of Marxism in the history of radicalism in Ethiopian politics, we need to address the Derg which played the central role in the country-wide institutionalization of Marxism in Ethiopia. The Derg was formed in June 1974 as a movement of radicalized men-in-uniforms. Its motto was 'Ethiopia *Teqdam*' ('Ethiopia First'). Its favourite song was:

Yalamenem dam, enkanewa yewdam
Baqana manfas Ityopya teqdam

[Without bloodshed, let her drawbacks be destroyed,
With kind heart, let Ethiopia come first.]

With the benefit of historic hindsight, the call by men in uniform for a bloodless change was quite novel, given that they were the very instruments of legalized violence. The Marxist reception for this call for bloodless change was one of derision. 'Where have revolutions ever taken place peacefully?' ask the Marxists. The point they seemed to forget was that the old order had lost command over its repressive state apparatuses. If those trained to kill said they didn't intend to kill, we should have thanked our blessings and moved on.

The Derg did not stay the course of its call for bloodless change. The Marxist torrential rain was pouring down heavily on Ethiopian soil, wetting the callers for bloodless change themselves. In November 1974, the Derg carried out its first official executions; its victims were the highest officials of the old order, and few others. The Derg crossed its own line of bloodless revolution; it now joined the rank of the 'genuine revolutionaries'. Justice in Ethiopia would have made a big leap forward had the detained officials of Haile Selassie's government been brought to court and made to defend the charges against them. The Derg actually created a Commission of Inquiry to look into the charges against these former officials. The charge was *Baseltan yabalagu* (those whom power corrupted) and the Commission was chaired by Bereket Habte Selassie, the Attorney General, and later the chief ideologue of Eritrean nationalism. Mesfin Woldemariam was also on the commission. All that, however, came to a halt with the executions of the '60'.

The Derg did not go straight from Ethiopia *Teqdam* to Marxism. It wanted to test still another ideology it dubbed *Hebratasabawinat* (Socialism), also known as *Ityopyawi Hebratasabawinat* (Ethiopian Socialism). Ethiopian Socialism drew a lot from Tanzania's Ujaama Socialism. The Derg in its early years was busy searching worldwide for the right ideology to guide the change that was underway in Ethiopia and it sent its military cadres all over the world. Tanzania was near, and its ideology of African Socialism not so outlandish to Ethiopia. It was then that the Marxist intellectuals in the AESM and even the EPRP began to have influence on the Derg. As a result, the Derg began to move in the direction of embracing the 'correct' ideology to guide the revolution: Scientific Socialism. Ethiopia *Teqdam*, Ethiopian Socialism, Scientific Socialism – these were the three stages the Derg passed through in less than two years of its reign. When it announced its epoch-making proclamation of land nationalization in March 1975, it had already embraced some

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

form of Marxism as its guide. But instead of Marxism adapting to Ethiopia, it was Ethiopia that was made to adapt to Marxism. From then on, 'Ethiopia' got a new appellation, 'Revolutionary Ethiopia'.

In 1977–1978, urban warfare broke out between the Derg, supported by its intellectual allies, and the EPRP. The Derg, with its Marxist intellectual allies, unleashed that darkness at noon in modern Ethiopian history, *qay sheber* ('Red Terror'), against what they called the *nach sheber* ('White Terror') of the 'counter-revolutionaries', principally the EPRP. The Red Terror campaign was Ethiopia's twentieth-century *kefu qan* (bad times). Unlike the *kefu qan* of the late nineteenth century, caused in the main by natural calamities, the new *kefu qan* was man-made.

In the fight to death between the Derg and its enemies during the Red Terror, some of the age-old cultural traditions held sacred by the people of Ethiopia were violated with utter disdain. Two stand out: the Derg's refusal to hand over the bodies of those it killed as 'enemies of the revolution' to their families for burial, and the criminalization of public mourning of those it killed. In Ethiopia, there are three cultural meanings of burial and public mourning: (1) burying the dead, and knowing their grave, brings closure to the living; (2) a grave is the site of the home of the deceased; and (3), a grave is the site of the memory of the deceased. People in old age wish to die in the land of their birth so that both their home and their memory live on for posterity.

The Derg did not just kill people; it tried to kill a cultural tradition held dear by the peoples of Ethiopia. By so doing, it trespassed in a very profound way on the cultural 'limits' of cruelty in Ethiopian history. The Derg replaced the tradition of personal grave with anonymous mass graves. Even the dead were not free of the Derg's totalitarianism. What the Derg aimed at was to deny the dead the right to be remembered. A revolution for the masses resulted in mass graves. The mass grave became akin to what Albert Memmi, in his *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1991), called 'anonymous collectivity'. The dead, as the enemies of the revolution, were to be rendered anonymous collectively.

For the Derg, counter-revolutionaries do not deserve the right to be remembered. What the Derg did was done in the name of a Marxist revolution. The Derg was supposedly carrying out its historic task of cleansing Ethiopia's past with one big revolutionary sweep. When it charged the parents of the deceased to pay for bullets used by the governments to kill their children – and this happened for those well-connected to the powers that be – it was done in the name of the revolution. The Chinese revolutionaries were cited as having done the same!

At the level of mental health, the killing and dehumanization of the deceased created a profound anguish among the living. It created a sense of homelessness in one's own home, a sense of not belonging, and a sense of not being able to link with the departed. What the Derg attacked was Ethiopian culture at its very root, reverence for the dead. It comes as no surprise that the moment the Derg fell, Ethiopians left no stone unturned to find out the resting place of their loved ones. If the place was located, reburials took place, bringing the dead back into the process of historical memory. It was as if slavery was over, and people were looking for loved ones separated by slave sales. Death is separation; with proper burial comes closure. The Derg denied the Ethiopian people the right for closure. In its sadism, the Derg has no parallel in Ethiopian history.

Some of the related vile acts of the Derg include forcing family members to gather around the deceased bodies of loved ones, including their own children as

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

happened in the town of Sakota, for example, and sing revolutionary songs, going in circles around them for hours.

Why did the Derg, along with its many Marxist intellectual allies, degrade the age-old traditions held sacred by the Ethiopian people? The answer, it seems to me, lies partly in the structure of knowledge introduced into Ethiopia, which created a process of cultural deracination and shame of things Ethiopian. This in part led to Ethiopia's ostentatious modernity (*asmassay zemanaawinet*). Ostentatious modernity is spurious modernity. It is vain modernity (*zebanay zemanawinat*).

One of the ethical foundations of Ethiopian social-moral philosophy that was transgressed with cold disdain during the Red Terror was *yelugnta*. *Yelugnta* refers to deference to public moral accountability and, literally, it means, 'What would people say?' *Yelugnta* acts as the definer of the ethical limits of the acceptable. There is no English equivalent for the word *yelugnta*. *Yelugnta* is the granting of the primacy of the public will over the individual will. It is self-conscious individual will to will the public good. It is a moral sanction against unethical conduct. It was this public moral universe that the Derg, alongside its allies, trespassed with cold disdain in the name of revolution.

There is another, more arrogant, rationale for the barbarism that was visited upon Ethiopia during the Red Terror. Marxism declares itself to be a scientific worldview that provides absolute knowledge of the 'laws of social development'. With such confidence in its own veracity, Marxism declares that heaven is on earth, and the proletarian revolution will make that a reality. Marx declared in his famous 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* that communism is the solution to the riddle of humanity. Ethiopian absolutist political culture was a fertile ground for accepting the absolutism of Marxism. Article 66 of the revised 1955 Ethiopian Constitution states of Haile Selassie: 'By virtue of his Imperial Blood, as well as by the anointing which he has received, the Person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and his power indisputable.' The 1966 (Ethiopian calendar) revolution targeted Article 66 of the Constitution. And yet, like Haile Selassie's absolutism, Marxists see Marxism's stature as 'sacred', its dignity of truth 'inviolable', and its scientific power 'indisputable'. The Derg, claiming to be true to Marxism, carried out its barbarism with the utmost self-righteousness.

The EPRP was also carrying out its own terror, labelled the 'White Terror' by its enemies. The EPRP was no less compromising than the Derg when it came to dealing with the 'enemies of the revolution': they were meant for elimination. EPRP assassins eliminated many prominent AESM intellectuals. Saying this, I would not equate the EPRP's assassination of Derg, Qaballe, and AESM cadres with the Red Terror carried out by the Derg and its allies. There was a huge difference in the *scale* of murder carried out by the two antagonists, the EPRP and the Derg. One thing is certain: *the Derg dragged Ethiopia into bottomless drudgery*. The mothers of this ancient land cried out for justice as their children were dragged out and slaughtered like sheep for Easter, their bodies thrown by the thousands on the streets of urban Ethiopia, some in front of houses of worship, before being dumped into mass graves. Even the Italian fascists did not carry out that kind of barbarism in their five-year occupation of Ethiopia, except during the Graziani massacre.

The Marxist groups, as the supposed possessors of absolute truth, found reconciliation with their 'enemies' absolutely unnecessary. In Marxist dialectic there is such a thing as irreconcilable contradiction, which can only be resolved through the

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

cleansing action of human sacrifice. Quite ironically, the old system that the revolution overthrew does not have a paradigm of irreconcilable differences. *Mehret* (pardon) and *ereq* (reconciliation) were the moral structures of the old political universe. There was the belief in being accountable to a higher power. There was also the culture of reconciliation, symbolized by the *dawal* (bell). Ringing a church bell is a critical component of conflict resolution in Christian Ethiopia. A person afraid of retribution from the powers that be goes to church and rings the church bell. The clergy come out to hear the person, and to initiate the process of pardon and reconciliation with the authorities. The Church was the institutional agent of reconciliation. It was ethically unacceptable for the secular-temporal power to go to the church and fetch out by force the person who rang the church bell. The Church was the legitimate sanctuary of the weak, the meek, and the helpless. There was also the culture of magnanimity in victory. *Negus* Menleik's handling of *Negus* Takla Haymanot after the latter's defeat at the Battle of Imbabao is a case in point. The Derg failed to be magnanimous in whatever victory it claimed to have achieved. Most of all, the Derg killed Ethiopia's children and boasted about it. This monster regime thought it heroic to drag a teenage girl from her Qaballe incarceration, murder her in cold blood after abusing her in all ways imaginable, throw her body as if it were that of a mad dog, and boast war cries (*qararto* and *fukara*) over the national radio. Nothing remotely close to this happened in our history. In Derg's Ethiopia, there was no sanctuary for the weak, no pardon for the wrongdoer, and no reconciliation with the enemy.

The Marxist *dawal* did not ring for reconciliation; it rang for blood. The revolution was thirsty for the blood of counter-revolutionaries (*dam yatemaw*, literally blood thirsty). Unfortunately for Ethiopia, the Marxist parties became each other's counter-revolutionaries. In the end, the claim to absolute knowledge made absolute terror possible absolutely. It is not accidental that the EPRP and the AESM reconciled their differences and agreed to work together *after* they renounced their Marxism. They transcended their self-enclosed and self-righteous mental universe only when they were no more certain of being in possession of the absolute truth.

At this point, let me reflect upon the Marxist episode in Ethiopia by comparing it with the Old Ethiopian intelligentsia that came out of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). This intelligentsia produced a fine coterie of first-rate scholars including Mahetmeselassie Woldemaskal, Mekonnen Endalkachew, Taklatsadeq Mekuria, Saifu Mahtemeselassie, Kebede Mikael, and Haddis Alemayehu, to name but few. This group of scholars wrote their works in Amharic. This intelligentsia had a reformist bent; it advocated change in Ethiopia, but not in a revolutionary manner. It admired modern Western civilization (*me'erabawi seletane*). Its admiration had limits, though. It was mostly the material-technical know-how of the Western world that attracted this group of intellectuals. Even as they wanted to tap into this material civilization, they were careful in separating the grain from the chaff. They opted to appropriate from Western modernity those aspects that were acceptable to Ethiopia's own needs. They called for an *appropriate appropriation* of Western modernity on Ethiopian grounds, rejecting anything that goes counter to Ethiopia's culture and honour. The so-called Japanizers fall into this category (Zewde 2002). Japan appropriated Western modernity without losing its Japanese soul. Ethiopia could do the same. Kebede Mikael's Amharic work, *Japan Endet Salatanach* (How Japan became civilized) (1994) is such an advocacy for the Japanese model of development.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

There was no communication between the Marxist groups and the Old intelligentsia. The Marxist groups scorned the Old intelligentsia as being 'bourgeois', 'feudal', etc. The irony is that they did so without even reading their works, with the exception perhaps of Haddis Alemayehu's masterpiece, *Feger Iska Maqaber* (1982). (Perhaps more people came to know *Feger Iska Maqaber* by listening to it being read on the national radio by Wagayahu Negatu during the early years of the Derg.) Because of their progressive views, Marxists thought people like Haddis Alemayehu could be won over to the New Democratic Revolution.

The Haddis Alemayehu group, if I may call the Old intelligentsia that, knew Ethiopia in depth; it also knew the West well. The Marxist generation by contrast knew Ethiopia much less. And yet, the Marxist generation had an indomitable courage and passion to liberate Ethiopia from its 'backwardness'. In terms of intellectual productivity, the Marxist groups were nowhere near the Haddis Alemayehu group. Which Ethiopian Marxist came up with anything close to *Feger Eska Maqaber*, that masterpiece in historical sociology coming from the pen of an EOC-educated Ethiopian intellectual, or Mahtemeselassie Woldemaskal's monumental work on the Ethiopian social system, *Zekera Nagar* (1942)? Unlike the Haddis Alemayehu group, the Marxist groups did not produce an intelligentsia worthy of the name. *Temhert kadel bahuala* (Education after victory) was the motto of the Marxist groups. Yet their lot, by and large, was neither education nor victory, but death and exile.

The Haddis Alemayehu group grew out of Ethiopia's own intellectual culture, the EOC. This intellectual tradition was what the Marxist group scorned as *dabtara* culture. The Marxist groups failed to note that many a prominent Western philosopher came out of Europe's deeply Christian-theological roots. Chief among these was Hegel. This group represented an Ethiopian 'organic intellectual'. It looked back into the Ethiopian past in its prescription for uplifting Ethiopia's future. It wanted to change Ethiopia based on a thorough knowledge of both Ethiopia and the West. Of course, this group did not pay the proper dues for Muslim and 'pagan' Ethiopia, as its organic ties with Ethiopia were mostly Christian. This was its major drawback. Still, the Haddis Alemayehu group, as it knew Ethiopia better than the Marxist, was also less Eurocentric than the Marxist group.

Staying with the question of Eurocentrism, in my judgement the most systematic critique of Eurocentrism to come out of the EOC intelligentsia is that of Asras Yanesaw. To my knowledge, the Western-educated Ethiopian intellectual of my generation who brought to light Asras Yanesaw's work and uses it as a foundation for his PhD dissertation and beyond is Ayele Bekerie. The second person, who discovered Asras Yanesaw recently, is Messay Kebede who wrote a piece on him posted on the Internet website, *Ethiopian Review* on 14 March 2008. It so happens that Ayele Bekerie and Messay Kebede are the two Ethiopian intellectuals, alongside Hailu Habtu and Fikre Tolessa, who are the foremost critics of Eurocentrism. Needless to say, this is a sad reality that reflects badly upon all of us.

Although I have heard his name being mentioned by my father during my childhood, I was introduced to Asras Yanesaw's work by Ayele Bekerie. Soon I began to search for Asras' books. All I could come up with was one, *Tebe Aksum Manu Anta* (1951), which I read repeatedly. Without exaggeration, this is the most consummate critique of Eurocentrism I have read from the pen of the EOC-educated intelligentsia. In *Tebe Aksum Manu Anta* Yanesaw conducts a critique of Eurocentrism on two fronts: against the European intellectuals and against those

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Ethiopians who have fallen for the Eurocentric paradigm. He makes the profound observation that the Eurocentric construction of Ethiopian identity began in the sixteenth century with the Portuguese presence in Ethiopia during *the dual crisis of the sixteenth century*: the wars between the Christian kingdom and the forces of 'Grag'n' and the historic expansion and territorial conquest of the Oromo. The Portuguese came to help the Christian kingdom against the Ottoman-supported forces of the Imam. But they wanted more. As they stayed on, and in collaboration with the Jesuits who came to Ethiopia at that time, the Portuguese began the process of denigration of things Ethiopian, including questioning the authenticity of its Christian practices. Yanesaw points to this as the major turning point in Ethiopian history. Per Yanesaw, the Western depiction of Ethiopia in the last five centuries since the Portuguese involvement has been one of deprecation.

Yanesaw also focuses on those Ethiopian scribes who had followed what he saw as the Eurocentric misconstruction of Ethiopian identity. He singles out two individuals: the formidable Ethiopian intellectual Kidanewald Kifle, the author of that historic treasure, *Matsehafa Sawasaw Wagees Wamazegaba Qalat Haddis* (1948), and a certain Abba Gasparini Gebremariam who wrote a book, *YaEthiopia Tarik* (History of Ethiopia) (1955) which he presented to Emperor Haile Selassie. What Yanesaw finds objectionable in both scholars' account about Ethiopian history is their uncritical acceptance of what I called the Orientalist Semiticist paradigm in the study of Ethiopia (Tibebu 1995). For Asras Yanesaw, Ethiopian history begins in Ethiopia, not Arabia. Ge'ez is a language of Kam (Ham), not Sem (Shem). The Ethiopic (Ge'ez) writing system starts from Ha and ends with Pa, not in the pattern of A B G D, which is the main claim of Kifle (1948) and his pupil Dasta Taklawald, who wrote the masterful Amharic dictionary (1962). In Yanesaw's eyes, these attempts were made to make Ethiopia line up with the Semitic and Western world. For him, to say that the old alphabetical order of the Ge'ez language was *Abugida* (A B G D) not Ha La Ha Ma, was intended to line it up with the Latin A B C D. The very fact that such sophisticated critique of Eurocentrism was being conducted by an EOC scholar shows that Ethiopia was not a land of 'clerical obscurantism', but rather a land of intellectuals of the highest critical mind.

Another comparative theme about these two different generations, with their differences of perspectives, is how they saw their 'enemy'. Haddis Alemayehu, in his historic memoir, *Tezeta* (Reminiscences) (1985), relates his ordeal during the Italian occupation. He states how, after the defeat of the imperial army at the Battle of Mai Chaw, and the decision of Haile Selassie to leave for Europe, the Ethiopian government under the leadership of Ras Emeru was moved to Gore in southwestern Ethiopia. He states that one of the reasons for this move was that the region is covered with forests, so that it rendered the bombing by the Italian planes less effective. Nevertheless, the local population did not grant the support the Ethiopian army expected. Actually, many local notables joined the Italians. Alemayehu expresses his devastation at this lack of support, and yet, nowhere in his book does he ever call the local population names like traitors, or *bandas*. Kebede Tessema, in his work, *Yatarik Mastawasha* (Historical Reminiscences) (1962) tells the story of how the Ethiopian soldiers returning from the defeat at Mai Chaw were killed by the Raya and Azabo. He states that more soldiers lost their lives in the Raya and Azabo attacks than at the Battle of Mai Chaw – and yet, he nowhere accuses the Raya and Azabo people of treason, or betrayal of their country. Both authors belonged to the

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

old Ethiopian culture of responsibility and respectability: to call people names would be unwise and uncalled for. They were deferential and sensitive to the people whose action they deplored. By contrast, the Marxist groups used dehumanizing, degrading, and defamatory names against one another.

As different as they were from each other, one factor both groups shared was their undivided love and affection for their country's well-being. The Haddis Alemayehu group was cautious in their handling of Western modernity. Rejecting the West for its imperialism and exploitation, the Marxists opted for socialism as the shortest path to development, with the additional advantage of being a system of social justice that capitalism could not provide. The Marxist groups were embedded in the Hegelian–Marxist developmentalist paradigm, the so-called stages of social development. They saw it as the scientific embodiment of universal truth. The task of the Ethiopian Marxist was to apply the universal truth of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse Tung's thought to the concrete Ethiopian reality. There was no critique of the claim of Marxist universalism. As a result, the Ethiopian Marxists did not address how and to what extent the Eurocentric foundations of Marxism 'fit' into a non-Western country like Ethiopia.

The Marxist groups sacrificed themselves in their struggle for the liberation of the downtrodden. The notion of sacrifice is religious. To sacrifice oneself for the revolution was the accepted mantra of the Marxist groups. Herein lies the link with the religious universe. *Maswaetant* (to be sacrificed), to give one's life for the 'cause' – this was taken as the highest expression of love of the masses. To sacrifice for the masses is in accord with the ideology rooted in the Judeo-Christian–Islamic tradition of which Ethiopia is the best example worldwide. The Ethiopian Marxist saw sacrifice as secular martyrdom. Victory comes out of 'human sacrifice'. EPRP militants sang songs of martyrdom as they were taken to their death by the Derg during the Red Terror. The words, '*tasawa*' '*taswaach*' (he is sacrificed, she is sacrificed, respectively) were common expressions for those who died during their struggle. Perhaps, after all, the Marxist groups were unable to completely transcend their Judeo-Christian and Islamic roots. The tragedy is that there was no ram to take the place of Isaac in the sacrifice. The revolution ate its own children. An Oromo peasant is said to have commented hearing this, 'like a cat?' Yes, the Ethiopian revolution was the cat that ate its own offspring.

There are many accounts written by Ethiopians about the traumatic events of the Ethiopian revolution, including the Red Terror. They are all written in Amharic, except Babile Tolla's, *To Kill a Generation: The Red Terror in Ethiopia* (1989). Tolla's account shows the depth of barbarity the Derg and its allies had sunk to during the dark days of the Red Terror. The image of Ethiopians as pious, God-fearing people was replaced by a monster regime that trespassed not only on the 'accepted' norms of cruelty in Ethiopian culture, but also one that descends into unimaginable sadism.

In their Amharic writings, many authors have depicted and explained what transpired in Ethiopia during the revolution. All the authors were involved in one or another aspect of the revolution. Andargachew Aseged, in his *Meison, Baacher Yataqacha Guzo: Meison Baityopya Hizboch Tegel Wust* (The Short-Cut Journey: Meison and its Role in the Ethiopian Peoples' Struggle) (2000), provides a detailed account of the history of the organization from its inception to its demise. Tesfaye Mekonnen, in his *Yedras Labalatariku* (Addressed to the History-maker) (1985) narrates the history of MALERID. Although a Seded-perspective book has not yet

come out, a book based on extensive interviews with Mengistu Haile Mariam in Zimbabwe was published by Genet Anbesse entitled, *Yaletena Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam Tezetawach* (Memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam) (1994). Kiflu Tadesse wrote a three-volume history of the EPRP in English entitled *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party*.

There are two puzzling accounts in these works. First, each author provides a sectarian view of the history of the Ethiopian revolution in such a way that what its party or organization did was right, while all the others were seen as being wrong. In some cases, this self-righteous view goes to extremes. For example, Mekonnen goes to the extent of rationalizing the Red Terror as being the logical culmination of the EPRP's adventurism. With the mania of hyperbole that was characteristic of the Ethiopian left, he states that it was the EPRP's 'fascistic and anti-democratic nature' that led in the end to its own demise (Mekonnen 1985, p. 241). In his view, the EPRP fell because it was a 'left-adventurist and terrorist organization' (p. 240). Regarding the AESM, his judgement was less harsh, but still callous and cantankerous. MALERID itself ended up being victim to the same process of liquidation that visited the EPRP, AESM, etc. And yet, Mekonnen does not attribute this to any mistake on MALERID's part, but to Seded's dictatorial appetite.

The second puzzle is the self-righteous declaration that the revolution was aborted at the moment the party in question left the scene or was liquidated. Accordingly, for the EPRP, a revolution it did not lead is no revolution. In the same vein, for Aseged, the departure of the AESM signalled the victory of the counter-revolution (2000, p. 431). Aseged also mentions some of the errors the AESM committed (p. 432).

Reading these works by Ethiopians who saw it all, with their own personal accounts and involvement in the events, gives us first-hand knowledge of the traumas and tribulations of the Ethiopian revolution. Despite the partisanship and other shortcomings, these works by Ethiopians who were directly involved in the events of the revolution should be given prime place in understanding the Ethiopian revolution. It is a rare advantage that history is written by those who made it.

The EPRDF represents the last chapter of the Marxist episode in Ethiopia. Contrary to the detractors who blame the EPRDF for inventing *zaragna* (ethnic or racist) politics, what the EPRDF has been doing since it came to power in 1991 is implement what the Marxist movements in Ethiopia have been advocating all along: the right of nations to self-determination, including and up to secession. Many of today's EPRDF's critics were themselves advocates of this theory. Article 39 of the Ethiopian Constitution that guarantees the right of secession has now become the single most important article the ex-Marxists hone in on their attack on the EPRDF. But then, the EPRDF itself repudiated its Marxism in 1991 when it came to power.

Marxism has lost its global appeal. Ethiopian Marxists, who once kept their right hand in their pocket and raised their left arm high up and pledged by 'Marxism, Leninism, Mao Tse Tung's Thought', as opposed to their own parents' names, have disappeared from the political landscape without explanation, and without any trace. Just as Marxism was accepted wholesale and uncritically in the past, it is now rejected and liberalism accepted wholesale and uncritically. In place of the left arm raised during the Marxist days, two middle fingers are raised now. Even then, these fingers seem to be on the wane now. All this, I surmise, stems from the shallowness of the Ethiopian intellectual encounter with Western modernity. Both Marxism and

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

liberalism are two aspects of the ideology of Western universalism, and as Immanuel Wallerstein has amply demonstrated, they formed, alongside conservatism, the three pillars of nineteenth-century Western paradigms (Wallerstein 2001). The Ethiopian ex-Marxists shifted their allegiance from one nineteenth-century Western paradigm, Marxism, to another, liberalism, without much thought and reflection – and it has been a smooth transition. The ex-Marxists wonder how they embraced an ideology that was to be proven wrong. They declared: *Marxism ayseram* (Marxism does not work). An ideology meant for liberation of the working people is declared not to work. Marxism in Ethiopia was instrumentalist Marxism. As such, its veracity was to be judged by whether or not it ‘works’. It ‘works’ means it ‘wins’. It is this militaristic–utilitarian interpretation that made the Ethiopian Marxist of yesterday run away from Marxism now with the same passion and tenacity as it ran towards it then.

Some ex-Marxists, like the French-educated philosopher Messay Kebede in his most important book to date, *Survival and Modernization* (1999), go to the extent of praising the old system that they once condemned as the culprit for Ethiopia’s many agonies. In Kebede’s neo-traditional interpretation of Ethiopian history, Haile Selassie was too radical for Ethiopia. Kebede’s old Ethiopia was a land of equal opportunity. This he calls *idil*. *Idil* provided the level playing field for a system based on plastic social mobility. Well, after all, Ethiopians say of children, ‘*baedulu yadgal*’ (he will grow by his luck) – and we know what that is like. The *idil* perspective on Ethiopian history is *idle* talk. Kebede glosses over the historic sufferings of the Ethiopian peasantry. There is not a single sentence in this 460-page book about the bleeding-dry of the poor under the *Geber* system. Even reformists like Haddis Alemayehu and Abe Gubagna stated quite explicitly the injustices of the old order. Deeply in guilt of inflicting serious harm to Ethiopia, the ex-Marxists like Kebede confess the sins of their Marxist past and join the group they once chastised as reactionary. Still others abandoned politics altogether. The ex-Marxists seem to ignore that: (1) Ethiopia was no Garden of Eden before the Marxist Eve misled the paradisiacal Adam into eating the forbidden fruit of Marxism; and (2) the first and foremost victims of the tragedy that befell Ethiopia during the revolution were the Marxist generation itself.

Any intellectual tradition worthy of the name does not simply evaporate into thin air. Even as it disappears, it leaves its residue for posterity. Therein lies its historical depth, the ‘depth of the historical field’, to use Anouar Abdel-Malek’s expression (Abdel-Malek 1981, vol. 2, p. 6). By contrast, a shallow and ostentatious disposition, as in Marxism in Ethiopia, disappears from the scene without trace since it was not of historical depth in the first place. The once formidable-looking Marxism in Ethiopia got a weak knee and soon afterwards crumbled into uncollectible pieces. What it praised a few years ago as the panacea for Ethiopia’s problems – class struggle, the right of nations to self-determination, including and up to secession, etc. – became words it has no patience to hear now.

In the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and Russia, there are still Communist Parties competing for political office. The Marxist tradition lives on, adjusting itself to the changes of the global situation. There are respectable Marxist intellectuals both in Europe and even in America. None of this is the case in Ethiopia. One could argue that Marxism in Ethiopia has been identified with the Derg’s reign of terror so much so that it is traumatic to mention Marxism in any

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

positive light. But so was Stalinism traumatic to Russians. And yet, the Communist Party of Russia is alive and well. What is puzzling about Ethiopia is that just as all organized political movements from the Derg to all its opposition and supporters once espoused some form of Marxism, now the EPRDF and all its supporters and opponents espouse the *leitmotiv* of the globalization lexicon – democracy, good governance, civil society, rule of law, etc. There are dozens of political parties in Ethiopia with similar programmes. In almost all of them one finds the word ‘democracy’. *Teraz nataq* (piecemeal) liberalism has replaced *teraz nataq* Marxism.

Liberalism

With the traceless demise of Marxism in Ethiopia, another Western paradigm has been captivating the ever-so-uncritical modernist Ethiopian intellectual culture: liberalism. The current love affair with liberalism among a wide sector of the Ethiopian intelligentsia is that many of those who ardently support it now are the very same people who were madly in love with Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse-Tung’s thought a generation ago. In a way, the current infatuation with liberalism among them has more to do with coming to terms with the ghost of their Marxist past than being one of a critical engagement with the philosophy and historical practice of liberalism, and how this fits into the Ethiopian social universe.

Liberalism is the newly found faith of a wide section of the Ethiopian intelligentsia, especially those who gather around and support Qenejet, or its many splinter wings. It has picked up some leftover (*terfrafi*) ideas that have outlived their historical time. Some of these expired terms that are now buzz words in the Ethiopian liberal ‘camp’ include *yasaltana polatica* (civilized politics), *mekeneyata-winat* (rationality), *raey* (vision), *chalemtganat* (fatalism) and *awdaminat* (nihilism). The Ethiopian ex-Marxist-turned-liberal thinks he has at last found the solution to the riddle that is Ethiopia that has eluded him all along: liberalism. By attributing *chalemtganat* (fatalism) as part of the culprit that kept Ethiopia so poor, the liberals argue as if the Ethiopian peoples were sitting idle with their arms stretched to heavens waiting for manna to fall on their laps. Perhaps the biblical adage, ‘Ethiopia stretches its hands unto God!’ is an endorsement of liberalism!

Professor Mesfin Woldemariam is one of the most senior intellectuals making the case for liberalism. He sees Ethiopian history as being a history of war (*yatornat tarik*) based on law of the jungle (*hega arawit*, lit. law of the beast) (Woldemariam 1994, 1996). In this account, Ethiopian history becomes the history of its ruling elites only. And all these ruling classes did was fighting one another for power, privilege, and prestige. It is as if the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian people have no history, as they did not engage in military conflicts with each other. The allegation that Ethiopia has been ruled by *hega arawit* is quite chilling, especially coming from a respected senior Ethiopian intellectual who knows well that if there is anything Ethiopians value high, it is reverence for the law: *heg* (law) and *feteh* (justice). Ethiopians used to invoke, *beheg amlak* (by God of the Law) to express the value they put on the law. The Amharic saying, *baheg sibal enquan saw wanz yeqomal* (when the law is invoked even the river stops moving, let alone a human being) shows how deeply felt the primacy of the law is. The lamentation of the meek, *daha tabadala feteh taguadada* (the poor are suffering, justice is trampled upon) show a sophisticated understanding of the yearning for justice. Mesfin Woldemariam knows

all this. He, more than many others, has never tired of repeating that Ethiopians invoke the adage, *beheg Amlak*. He even wrote a piece with that same title. What is sad is that when intellectuals turn politicians, what matters most for them is not the power of 'truth', but the 'truth' of power. That is, scoring points against one's political adversary, while presenting their view as the 'right' one.

In the history of Ethiopia, the ecclesiastical and imperial authorities of the Christian kingdom were not free to do whatever they liked. Their actions were circumscribed by established rules codified in the *Fetha Nagast*. The civil war that broke out against Emperor Susneyos when he converted to Catholicism was because he transgressed the established rule of law that the head of the Ethiopian state had to be the protector of the EOC. He finally abdicated his office and spent the rest of his life in a monastery reflecting upon his transgression and praying for redemption. His son Fasil took power, and the EOC was back in its legitimate place. The public protest at the time was *Fasil yenges, haymanot yemelas* (let Fasil be king, and let religion take back its former place).

What is even more disturbing about the *hega arawit* approach to Ethiopian history is the complete neglect of the history of a large sector of the Ethiopian peoples, primarily in Southern Ethiopia. The Oromo, for example, had a sophisticated democratic legal system, Gada, which is anything but *hega arawit* (see Legesse 1973, 2001). In short, there was no *hega arawit* in Ethiopian history. Ethiopia was ruled on the basis of rule of law. The powers that be were mandated to abide by established laws, written and/or customary. They were not allowed to rule arbitrarily.

If by 'rule of law' one means political democracy, we are then talking about a *different kind* of rule of law. The contrast should then be not between rule of law and its absence, but rather of different kinds of modalities of rule of law. These differences emanate from differences in cultural, religious, and historical circumstances the details of which we have no space to delve into. After all, apartheid South Africa and Jim Crow America were both based on 'rule of law'.

The charge that Ethiopian history is a history of war conflates the two facets of power relations in Ethiopian history. First are the vertical power relations between rulers and subjects. The precise meaning of these power relations is unmistakably spelled out in the Amharic words *Bala Seltan* [one with power and authority] and *Zega* (subject). These are relations of domination /subjection, hence undemocratic. The second aspect pertains to the social-cultural relations among the *Zega*. Unlike the former, these relations are not relations of domination/subjection. Most analyses of Ethiopian politics, centring on 'historic Ethiopia' and ignoring such cases as Oromo Gada democracy, focus on the vertical power relations between rulers and ruled; they give no recognition to the horizontal social-cultural ties among the majority of the Ethiopian peoples which took democratic forms. I call these horizontal democratic cultures 'communal democracy'. These indigenous forms of communal democratic cultures should be brought to light and be centred in Ethiopia's democratic restructuring.

The liberal denigration of Ethiopia's past is meant to highlight the brave new world liberals promise Ethiopians. Like their Marxist predecessors, the liberals want to break clean of Ethiopia's past, as they see not much worth taking.

In our search for a social democratic transformation of Ethiopian societies, we need to look deep into the indigenous foundations of human rights and democracy

in Ethiopia. One of the central ideas of human rights is the recognition of the humanity of people who happen to be 'different' in their identities, be these ethnic, religious, regional, etc. The handling of these differences in a tolerant, respectful, and accommodative manner constitutes one of the fundamental concepts of democracy – Ethiopia has that tradition of communal democracy.

One of the chief ideologues of liberalism in Ethiopian politics is Andargachew Tsige, author of the Amharic book, *Natsanaten Yamayaweq 'Natsa Awechi': Seletanie, Democrcayna Beltsegena: Yapoletica Leheqanu Mina Bazamanwet Ityopya* ('Freedom Fighters' Who Don't Know Freedom: Civilization, Democracy and Development: The Role of the Political Elite in Modern Ethiopia) (1997). The main focus of the book is a critique of what the ESM called *beher teyage* ('national question'). Tsige rejects the label, '*beher teyage*'. He expresses his disdain of the use of the term '*beher*'. Since Ethiopian Marxists translated the English word 'nation' as '*beher*', and since Tsige did not like this Marxist term '*beher*' any more (like many ex-Marxists he used to use it in his Marxist days), he went searching for a word that is non-Marxist. Not finding it in Amharic, he 'discovered' it in Ge'ez. That word is '*zaweg*'. What Tsige seems not to notice is that the word '*beher*' does not have the same connotation as the Marxists thought it had. More importantly, the word *zaweg* has never been used in Ethiopia for self-identification. While the word '*beher*' was used quite commonly by Amharic and Ge'ez scholars, who identified themselves as *Zabehera* Bulga (of Bulga *beher*), *Zabehera* Dima (of Dima *beher*), *Zabehera* Zegie (of Zegie *beher*), etc., no one ever identified themselves as the *Zazawega* Bulga (Bulga *zaweg*) etc. In Kifle's Ge'ez dictionary, the word '*zaweg*' means 'two, dual, twin, overlapping twofold, husband and wife'. Further meanings are given as 'relative, one's peers, one's resemblance, friend' (1948, p. 415). '*Zaweg*' means close relatives, not ethnicity. No Amhara says Amharas are his/her relatives. If *beher* as the Marxist translation of 'nation' is wrong, it is even worse for the word '*zaweg*' to be rendered as a translation of the supposedly non-Marxist term 'ethnicity'. Do the people of Gojjam and Northern Shawa belong to the same '*zaweg*', i.e. are they related? If Tsige's answer is yes, by virtue of both speaking the same Amharic language, I say to him to go back to his dictionary and check what '*zaweg*' means. The word 'language' does not show up in the definition at all. All this trouble comes from attempts by Tsige and his likes to translate an English term into Amharic. What is the need to do so? Why doesn't he use terms and expressions the peoples of Ethiopia use and then attempt, if necessary, to find English, French equivalents and so on? Using the wrong word *zaweg*, Tsige is bound to lose his way in understanding 'ethnic' politics in Ethiopia. In Gojjam, for example, the term 'Amara' means Christian. No Muslim Gojjame identifies as being 'Amara'. When a person declares, 'From now on, you and I are *Islamna Amara*', it means we have parted company. And yet, Amharic is the mother's tongue for both the 'Amara' and the 'Islam' (Muslim). Perhaps nowadays, with the EPRDF-imposed identity, the word 'Amara' may have an ethnic-linguistic meaning in Gojjam which it did not have before. Thus whether one uses '*beher*' or the more irrelevant neophyte word '*zaweg*', they do not have the meaning that Tsige or the Marxists intend to imply.

The word '*beher*', if used without translating it as the Marxist concept of 'nation', explains the Ethiopian reality better, and more profoundly. One can also use words like *gossa*, *nagad*, etc. We can and should also use terms of identification used in the various Ethiopian languages. They are all Ethiopian terms of self-definition.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The word '*beher*' is Ge'ez. Kifle provides a long list of meanings including: 'place, region, and subdivisions in a region'; 'Land, country, town, rural area, awraja administration, region divided by appointment and territorial demarcation'; 'Man, relatives, *nagad*, people (*hezeb*) distinguished by language, state, administration, and law.' Quite interestingly, '*beher*' also means 'parts of a book, chapters, the Old and New Testament of the Bible'. The word *Egziabeher* means 'God of the land and the sky', thus extending the word's meaning into the supernatural (Kifle 1948, p. 61). All these different meanings of the word '*beher*' do not fit into the Stalinist straightjacket with its famous six 'criteria'. Nevertheless, *beher* makes more sense as a marker of identity in Ethiopia than the fable invention, '*zaweg*'. *Beher* denotes not people, but the land they live on. *Beher* is the land of a people, not the people of a land. When people identify their *beher*, they mean to refer to the land they are from, not the language they speak, the culture they follow, or the religion they practise. *Beher* is regional, trans-ethnic, trans-religious identity.

An example to make the case for using the word *beher* instead of *zaweg* is to look at a related word, *agar*. In Amharic, the word *agar* is used in three different ways: as country, region, and locality. I could thus say that my *agar* is Ethiopia, Gojjam, and /or Dabra Marqos. That is, I am an Ethiopian, a Gojjame, and a Marqose. These three are all my *agars*.

The EPRDF does not shy away from using the term *beher*. But it does so in the tradition of the ESM, i.e., by rendering it as a term which does not correspond to what it means in Ge'ez/Amharic. For the EPRDF, as for the ESM, *beher* is a translation of the Marxist term, 'nation'. It refers to people, not land. Following its Marxist roots, the EPRDF creates a three-layer hierarchy among the people of Ethiopia: *beher* (nation), *beherasab* (nationality), and *hezbotch* (peoples). These three terms are supposed to denote different *stages* of social development: *beher* is the most advanced, followed by *beherasab*, while *hezbotch* refers to those that are the least advanced. We are in the same Eurocentric framework of thinking. The simple fact is that none of the various peoples of Ethiopia identify themselves with any of these categories: the Marxists created them. Since they know the 'objective laws of social development', they know thus into which category of hierarchical classification each people in the country supposedly belong. Accordingly, the Amhara are classified as *beher*, the Gumuz as *hezbotch*. I am afraid that the term '*hezbotch*' comes dangerously close to the term '*ahzab*', which in the terminology of Christian Ethiopia means heathen and barbarian. But I don't think that is what the EPRDF has in mind when they use the term. They simply don't have any other term of reference; they have run out of Marxist terms.

Coming back to Tsige, another word he uses, which is also used by the 'sophisticated' Addis Ababa elite, is '*leheq*'. *Leheq* is supposedly the translation of the English word 'elite'. It is not Amharic; it is Ge'ez. Kifle gives the meaning for the word '*leheq*' as, 'to grow, to become adult, and to reach manhood (*akala matan madras*)'. Further meanings are given as, 'to excel, to be great in power and number, and in time'. It also means 'Old, elder, to be infirm in old age' (Kifle 1948, p. 559). There is no meaning implying elite in the definition. The word, *liq*, on the other hand, means what Tsige and his likes meant to mean, i.e., educated elite. The word is Ge'ez, as well as Amharic. Since *leheq* means to grow old or achieve one's majority, how does it relate to the title of the book and the discussion throughout? Is Tsige talking about the elders? Once again, the use of a wrong word could only create confusion, as if we don't have enough confusion already.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

In a different but related context is the politically important term '*zega*'. It is Ge'ez, also used in Amharic. It means 'ruled, *gabbar*, tenant, *balagar*' (Kifle 1948, p. 418). *Zegenat* does not mean 'nationality' or citizenship. It means quite simply 'subject.' In other words, the ruling classes of what I called the *Geber* system (Tibebu 1995) were not *zega*, as they were not subjects. They were sovereign (*bala seltan*). Ethiopia had no citizens, only sovereigns and subjects. It is such examples that make it imperative that we look at our own languages and learn what they mean. It saves us from searching for words in Western linguistic malls and scramble to find their equivalents in the Ethiopian languages.

Even as he looks into Ge'ez to find the corresponding term for the word 'ethnicity', Tsige emphatically declares that in the history of modern elite participation in Ethiopian politics, opportunism has its roots in the *gultagna* and *dabtara* culture (Tsige 1997, p. 204). He also throws the common liberal charge that the old order was one where *chalemtagnenat* (fatalism) reigned supreme.

A detailed critique of Tsige's book is beyond my call here. Suffice to mention that the terms he and other liberal neophytes use to charge the old order are terms of the modernization paradigm of American Social Science created in the context of the anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s, the period of McCarthyism. This paradigm has been discredited by American academia itself long before the end of the Cold War. But Tsige, like his liberal peers, uses it as if it were the latest invention in the production of knowledge. According to the discredited modernization paradigm, the reason why Ethiopia, like the rest of the Third World, remains 'backward' is because it is under the spell of a fatalistic, resignationist, and pessimistic worldview that sees this world as a mere preparation for the eternal afterlife. The West, we are told, is rational; the non-West, by contrast, is the abode of the irrational. No one takes such racist views seriously any more, at least not in the 'West'.

Tsige's book is the first of its kind written in Amharic from a liberal perspective. It represents a good sector of the Ethiopian political community. It should not be dismissed with disdain. More importantly, since Tsige is the author of the Qenejet manifesto, his importance in contemporary Ethiopian political discourse cannot be underestimated. One point he makes, which I happen to agree with, is that many of Ethiopian intellectuals' work is by and large an uncritical imitation of ideas and concepts produced in a different cultural environment, and copied and pasted to Ethiopia. He rightly calls this a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Ethiopian intellectuals need to base their work on Ethiopian foundations in order to be able to articulate views and ideas relevant to Ethiopia's needs, Ethiopia's realities. These realities should reflect a thorough and sympathetic study of Ethiopia's histories, cultures, communities, religions, etc. Although I do not advocate the so-called 'Ethiopian solution to Ethiopian problems', since many of Ethiopia's problems like poverty are not Ethiopian as such but are world-system problems manifesting themselves in the Ethiopian locale, I could not envision any viable solution to the myriad of challenges that face Ethiopia by simply jumping from one pre-packaged panacea, Marxism, to another, neoliberalism. Instead of jumping from one-size-fits-all Marxism to liberalism, let us study our history first. Before we take in any pre-packaged idea as a solution, let us first unpack the package and see its content. Then we sort out what we need to appropriate from what we don't.

The Ethiopian intelligentsia needs to critically appraise the limits of the Western modernist paradigm, and the extent of its relevance to Ethiopia. It should do so not

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

by embracing everything in our past in the name of cultural authenticity, and by the rejection of modernity as such. Many crimes against humanity are committed in the name of authenticity. I for one do not intend for Ethiopia to go back to the time of slavery, *lebashay* or *quragana*. I do not call for a rejection of modernity *per se* either, but rather to see the limits of what Habermas called ‘the Enlightenment project’ and its claim to universalism. We cannot be a country of donor-driven research and donor-driven politics and still declare our pride in our long and illustrious history of freedom and independence.

It is perplexing how a country like Ethiopia with its millennia-long history produced an intellectual class which finds nothing worth taking from her past but instead jumps from one Western episteme to another. It is as if Ethiopia in all its long history has produced nothing worth incorporating in the search for her modernity. The process of Eurocentric cultural deracination is so deep, so profound, and so formidable to make both Marxists and liberals agree: Ethiopia’s salvation comes from without, not from within. Ethiopia has become a *tabula rasa* with nothing of her own to contribute to her renewal. As a blind beggar, she pleads with passers-by to help her find her way. It is this aspect of Eurocentrism that makes one shiver with anger and bewilderment. Where is our freedom if we are not able to stand on our two legs, but rather on someone else instead?

It is essential that Ethiopians fight for the three d’s: democracy, development, and dignity. The point is: as much as we care about the *development* of democracy, we need to ponder over the *democracy* of development. That is, Ethiopia needs an environmentally friendly development but with social justice. Development as conquest of nature *per se* is not a viable option. And a democracy where the rich and powerful buy their way to power is not the democracy Ethiopia needs. Such democracy is legalized hypocrisy. Democracy should be a *socially conscious* democracy, a socially responsible democracy, a democracy that takes its primary goal to be the liberation of the majority of the Ethiopian people from their immersion in the bottomless pit of abject poverty. As Gandhi once said, poverty is the highest form of human rights violation. We need to have both political democracy and social justice together, not one first, the other later. They should come together as two sides of the same coin. We don’t need ‘stages of development’. We know what that got us into. What we need is social democracy, or what I prefer to call ‘communal democracy’. The main objective of communal democracy is the enhancement of communal well-being, especially the continuation and growth of Ethiopia’s beautiful culture of communal tolerance of differences.

As we search for ways to achieve democracy with social justice, we need to think hard and fast that no matter what we choose for our country’s future, it should not come at the expense of our dignity as a people. A country like ours which stood up time and again against the onslaught of barbarian invaders who sugar-coated their adventure with the mantra of ‘civilization mission’ should find it demeaning to be at their gates and practise *daj tenat* (attendance at the gate). Those who have contempt for us are not the ones from whom we should ask for help. Doing that would be a dagger aimed at the heart of what makes us Ethiopians – proud and dignified people despite our material poverty.

The challenge for the young and next generation of Ethiopians is to identify the positive cultural and political values and practices from Ethiopia’s *composite past* that could serve as grounds for building a future of compassionate peace and social

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

justice for the Ethiopian people. I doubt if Ethiopia will be able to extricate itself from the myriad of problems piled up in its body politic if Ethiopians were to think that their past is one heap of backwardness enveloped in the mantle of darkness. Ethiopia cannot start its history anew. The past leaves its mark, its residue for posterity. It is the task of the living to intelligently filter through the mist of the past, separate the grain from the chaff, appropriate foreign ideas and practices *in as much as they are beneficial to the betterment of our people's lives*, and leave a much more liveable Ethiopia to posterity than what our parents handed us over. In this, we do have a choice. As ostentatious Marxism was no solution to Ethiopia's many problems, neither is liberalism. It is time that we 'return to the source' (Cabral 1973) of our cultural heritages and draw inspiration and guidance from them.

Ethiopia went through three tumultuous revolutions in one generation (1961–1991): class, national, and 'anti-colonial' (Eritrea). What she has not done is this: a restructuring of social relations that goes right into the heart of the power structure, gender relations. Restructuring of gender relations in the direction of women's empowerment brings forth peace and democracy. 'Women's empowerment', let that be the slogan of the now and the future. With the establishment of gender equality, Ethiopia will at last achieve the freedom that it has so much aspired for, and which has so much eluded it.

In closing, let me say a few lines about the possible future of Ethiopia. Ethiopia faces many problems. That is no news. The solution to its many problems does not lie in creating new political entities, reproducing on a smaller scale the injustices of the bigger one. What is required is the alteration of the power relations in such a way as to give the Ethiopian people voice in the running of their lives. I have no doubt that the Ethiopian people will see to it that living together in peace is preferable to crossing swords with each other along newly-created state boundaries. Cultivating the soil of common ground with the plough of tolerance and mutual respect of differences, sowing the seed of *substantive democracy*, as opposed to the current practices of *formal democracy* where the economically affluent buy their way to power, to bear the crop of decent human living for our people: that is worth aspiring for.

Politically, the advocacy for Ethiopian unity should be neither the celebration of an abstract unity that suffocates difference, nor one that celebrates difference and shies away from unity. Ethiopian unity should be a 'concrete universal', to borrow Hegel's term, i.e. one that reconciles unity with difference, and vice versa. *Techachilo menor* (to live in tolerance of difference), that is in accord with Ethiopian cultures. Let that be the guide for the future.

Notes on contributor

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ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

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The Beta Israel and the impossible return

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The aim of this article is to explore the origins of the Beta Israel people; analyse the conditions of their existence in mainland Israel; and critique the notions of displacement and diaspora as applied to their historical experience in Ethiopia. Scholars of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel tend to project them as a marooned community, one without roots in Ethiopia and yet denied the right to live decently under Israeli law. In rethinking the agency of Beta Israel it is important not to adopt a theoretical perspective that is romantically uncritical of their struggle for human dignity. Nor should their struggle for identity formation be belittled in any way or simply dismissed as a negative *fait accompli*. This article argues that the existential experiences of the Beta Israelis can best be described as diasporic. Diaspora is in fact the language of those on the margins of history; those who nevertheless insist on having their stories told from their point of view. Diaspora acknowledges the possibility of returning to imagined communities previously abandoned. Ironically, diaspora also forces us to reckon with the possibility of taking up options such as integration and dissolution in host-communities. These are choices and processes fraught with contradictions; they leave permanent social and historical imprints on the affected people and can produce unintended or unexpected consequences for the communities in diaspora.

Introduction: the postcoloniality of Beta Israel identity, culture and diasporas

The history of the Beta Israel, both in Ethiopia and Israel, has been the victim of jaundiced and uncritical assessment. Haim Nahum, the travelogue writer and rabbi, for example, reveals his bias against them when he describes the Beta Israeli as 'fierce ... warlike ... bloodthirsty and cowardly people' (Benbassa 1999, p. 107). The work of Kessler (1982) mocks them as exiles or strangers. While some scholars have fashioned a discourse denying the Beta Israel claims that they are indeed true Jews with rights in Israel, others such as Kaplan (1992b) have cast doubt on their origin and questioned their motives for wanting to be described as Beta Israelis.

To see the Beta Israelis as being in a state of diaspora in both Ethiopia and Israel is to recognize the dynamizing potential that each of these locations has on their cultural and political identity. Diaspora is a complex phenomenon including both physical and spiritual movements, motivated by a wide range of factors that are religious, political and cultural in nature. Schramm has suggested that we should

stop talking of the diaspora in the singular. Diaspora and the plural, diasporas, are articulated at different pitches. While most diasporas are involuntary, and involve push and pull factors, it is important to imagine and distinguish the Beta Israelis diasporas in terms of 'victim, trade, cultural, religious political, economic and labour diasporas' (Schramm 2008, p. 6). The Beta Israeli's struggles do in most cases share commonalities of motivation for leaving Ethiopia to go to Israel, but a critical exploration of these struggles also reveals that they have taken different options in their quest for belonging to a larger Israel polity.

This article challenges Beta Israelis scholars to rethink the epistemic conditions that created the Beta Israeli's need to struggle for recognition in Israel; to understand and not scoff at their attempts to adapt to Israel culture. This has not been a straightforward debate; it has involved bitter struggles waged from both sides. The Beta Israel insist that they want to be absorbed into Israeli society with all recognizable rights; rights that apply to all Israelis. On the other hand, the authorities in Israel are trying to limit the conditions of freedom that they are able to enjoy.

In seeking to return either to Ethiopia or the promised land of Israel, do the Beta Israel assume that they will regain a complete identity? Are identities ever complete? The incompleteness of the argument on Beta Israel identities is deliberately alluded to in the subtitle of this article: 'The Impossible Return'. If this strikes the reader as pessimistic, it is not intended to be so. In fact, the opposite is true. By seeking to return to Ethiopia, Beta Israelis may imagine a coherent cultural wholeness towards the Ethiopian state – one not previously there; it has been virtually impossible to attain because Ethiopia also has its own intractable political, cultural and economic difficulties, making it a less likely place of return for a people who are struggling against various forms of discrimination in Israel. What is possible about the 'impossibility' of a return to an intact identity is the production of knowledge that enables Beta Israel to survive in Ethiopia and Israel equipped with an understanding of the existential realities of betrayal and an innate resistance to different forms of tyranny. In other words, what is 'impossible-possible' for the Beta Israel is to look back at the past like the proverbial Ghanaian Sankofa bird. They must retrieve usable elements from that past in order to confront the present and forge ahead with lives lived in contradictory terms. But in order to recreate and capture a sense of collective *déjà vu*, among the Beta Israel, one needs to trace the paths that their quest has taken. One also needs to expose the social problems that they have faced and acknowledge the optimism they cling to for a better life under conditions that are designed to induce a sense of pessimism.

Lack of appreciation of Beta Israel culture

After the large-scale emigration of the Beta Israel to Israel during the last third of the previous century, there was discrimination against them in Israel. This took different forms, being part of a general pattern of discrimination against Oriental, Middle Eastern and African Jews. Rejection of the Beta Israel in Israel made them an unaccommodated people and this raised the spectre of a morally repugnant statelessness with all its dire consequences for the Beta Israel.

The Ethiopian Jews are previous residents of Africa, who now claim original standing in one of the major monotheistic world religions. They are not repositories of the enlightenment of religion from the West but instead position themselves as its

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

originators and progenitors; as creators and authenticators of its practice. However, in terms of traditional imperialist views, their blackness marked them as heathens awaiting salvation; awaiting the opportunity to be 'civilized'. Since Ethiopia is in Africa, the Beta Israel's blackness is indisputable. The criticism heaped on them was turned towards their Judaism, which has been unjustifiably and inaccurately targeted as false.

At the time of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Jewish population was just over 700,000 (Wagaw 1993, pp. 38–39). Of these people, 35% were born in Palestine. Of those born abroad, 85% were born in Europe, America or Oceania; 12% in Asia and only 3% in Africa. Soon after statehood was achieved, displaced European Jews from camps in Germany, Austria and Italy received priority for migration. About 100,000 Polish and 120,000 Romanian Jews migrated to Israel between 1949 and 1951. During the same period, non-European Jews arrived in Israel in huge numbers. Between 1948 and 1950 almost the entire Jewish population of Libya and 40,000 Jews from Yemen emigrated to Israel. They were followed by 124,000 Jews from Iraq and 27,000 from Iran. Of the total number of Jews arriving between 1949 and 1951, only about half were from Europe; 35% from Asian countries (mostly Iraq, Yemen, Persia and Turkey) and another 14% from North African countries (largely Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya). In other words, about half the arrivals during that period were from the Third World countries of Asia and Africa. This pattern continued.

Despite these great numbers from places other than Ethiopia, the Israeli government was accommodative of these people who, as Jews, claimed the right of residence in Israel. However, the mass migration of Oriental Jews to Israel, which included the Beta Israel, was interpreted by the Ashkenazi population of Israel at the time as the Orientalization of Israel and was a disturbing challenge to the concept of *mizug galuyot* (the fusion and integration of exiles). The Oriental Jews were seen as backward in their economic, cultural, educational and technological advancement as well as in their sense of civic responsibility. In short, their traditions were considered to be an obstacle to modernization. To the Ashkenazim, this implied the necessity for an immediate, large-scale programme of modernization that was to include aspirations for 'national' culture and solidarity. It was considered essential to obliterate the 'inferior' traditions of the Oriental immigrants and replace them with Ashkenazim traditions and Western attitudes and behaviour. The task implied the de-socialization, socialization and re-socialization of the Orientals. In many ways the policies were similar to those of the European colonists toward their Asian and African subjects until the first half of the twentieth century.

Inequalities persisted in Israel during the early 1990s, significantly also between the Ashkenazim and the Orientals, especially in educational attainment, employment opportunities, power and status. Wagaw (1993, pp. 51–52) argues that such discrepancies cannot be explained by biological differences alone. In Israel it is to a large extent the Jews from the Middle East that form the working class (Halper 1987, p. 112). The ideology of *mizug galuyot* (the Hebrew version of the 'melting pot' concept) required the elimination of ethnic (in this case, Eastern) cultures in Israel, and acceptance of the Ashkenazi culture. This was supported and legitimized by the 'absorption' agencies, mass media and the academic community, all of which stereotyped the new immigrants, especially from Muslim countries, as 'primitives'. The right of the 'absorption' agencies to determine all aspects of immigrants' lives

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

was justified as being in the interests of the immigrants themselves. Breaking the old culture was seen as a positive step.

In the 20 years that separated the mass *aliyah* of the 1950s and that of the Ethiopian Jews in the 1970s and 1980s, it was reasonable to expect fundamental differences in the conception and organization of the 'absorption' process (Halper 1987, p. 125). However, the 'absorption' process was not changed or reformed in any way; nor were the 'mistakes' of the 1950s avoided or addressed during the later period. By forcing the uncompromising 'melting pot' policy on the Beta Israel, eliminating their culture as an adaptive resource, channelling immigrants to the periphery of society and exerting bureaucratic control over them, the process of integration of the Beta Israel and the social problems that followed were virtually identical to the infamous 'mistakes of the 1950s' (Halper 1987, p.125). In the process, the cultures of immigrants from Africa (among them the Beta Israel), the Orient and the Middle East were neutralized and immobilized; as Halper so bluntly puts it, they were 'emasculated'. Throughout, interaction with Israelis was minimal and immigrants were pushed to the margins of society in the belief that 'absorption' would come about without endangering the modern, Western character of the society (Halper 1987, pp. 131–133).

'Absorption' authorities exhibited an unwillingness to admit that Beta Israel culture had any meaningful role in the integration process. Ethiopian immigrants were perceived to have emerged from a situation so extraordinarily different and backward that it had to be eliminated in order for successful absorption to take place. Immigrants were judged to be too incompetent to play an active part in decisions regarding their own integration. In truth, the Ethiopian community in Israel was more diverse than the Israelis realized. It was religious, traditional and secular; it comprised people from isolated rural groups and groups that had been exposed to outside influences; from village to urban groups; it varied widely in composition, including illiterate individuals to those who were university-educated; from traditionally-oriented to Marxist (Halper 1987, p.130). There was enough potential, both in the community's general exposure to modern influences and in the significant number of well-educated young people, for the immigrants to contribute much more to decisions regarding their integration than was indeed utilized. However, officials of the Jewish Agency testified to the Knesset Immigration and Absorption Committee that the Ethiopians were 'too primitive' to cope with larger cities in the centre of the country, where 85% of the Jewish population live.

The Ethiopian immigrants were socially distanced. An arrangement was reached between the Jewish Agency and the Chief Rabbinate that all matters relating to individual status, education and religious observance would become the sole responsibility of the Orthodox establishment. Symbolic conversion (*giur l'khuma*) was imposed on the Beta Israel community despite fierce, sometimes violent, resistance. Many young people and older priests interpreted this as doubting their Judaism (Halper 1987, p. 126). The structure of the 'absorption' process for the Beta Israel was essentially identical to that of the 1950s. Precisely those elements that distinguished and defeated the 'absorption' process in the 1950s characterized the 'absorption' of the Ethiopian immigrants in the 1980s. It divided immigrants into cultureless, bureaucratic categories; it was an ineffective artificial integrative policy which separated the immigrants from the host society and hindered their acceptance and their learning of necessary social skills. It also channelled immigrants to the

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

social peripheries, polarizing and alienating them while engendering a debilitating dependency (Halper 1987, p. 134).

At no time from entering Israel to the stage of being assigned permanent housing did the Ethiopian immigrants have any opportunity to state their case on any aspect of their own integration. Absorption officials were far less confident in the 1980s than they had been three decades earlier when it came to the effectiveness of their policies. They made an effort to publicize the reasoning behind the 'absorption' policy, participated in public discussions and at least outwardly appeared to consult with experts and immigrants. However, the structures within which they operated, their views, assumptions, policies and results were almost identical to those of the 1950s and rendered the policy-makers defensive and insecure. The indications were that the new approach was doomed to fail.

Thus the 'melting pot' philosophy destroyed precisely the mechanism which could have ensured social integration and solidarity. Eastern immigrants were promised complete inclusion, but although they fulfilled their side of the bargain, the authorities did not. The result was Beta Israel alienation and rage towards the 'absorbers' because they were seen as having robbed the Beta Israel of their 'primordial identity', leaving them with neither an 'Israeli' identity nor their own traditional identity (Halper 1987, p. 132). The initial adjustment problems experienced by the Beta Israel revolved largely around their experience over many years. They were convinced that they had been subjected to both racial and cultural discrimination.

The position of the Beta Israel today

Education

Education remains the only way to improve the social and economic status of the Beta Israel (Gates to Jewish Heritage, n.d., p. 3). Ethiopian students in the late twentieth century were faced by a number of formidable obstacles in the Israeli education system and increasing numbers of Ethiopian youth began dropping out of school. This created a host of social problems and importantly, served to perpetuate the poverty cycle. Although there has been some progress, all is not yet well in the Israeli education system as it pertains to the education of Ethiopian immigrant children. In the elementary schools, little appears to have changed. The Beta Israel children are still largely concentrated in weak schools where it is not unusual to have an enrolment of between 20 and 35% Ethiopians. The rest of the pupils come mostly from poor North African or Middle Eastern immigrant families. The scarcity of school supplies, including books, persists. A lower proportion of Ethiopian children prepare their homework regularly than do native Israeli children (41% and 71% respectively). This can be ascribed to several factors, including the lack of supplies and books; a low level of external enrichment; crowded conditions at home that are not conducive to study; and unsuccessful mastery of basic skills.

In high school, segregation is even more prevalent. The Youth Aliyah boarding schools have not proved successful and have been a factor in the breakdown of family life for teenagers. Ethiopians are often shunted into the slower classes, whereas three-month intensive courses in English and mathematics might have been considered as a viable solution to the problems experienced by the learners. Apparently this happens only on a very small scale. The proportion of Ethiopians

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

passing the *bagrut* [matriculation equivalent], which was only 3% in 1997, rose significantly to approximately 12% of the total population of 18-year-olds a few years later.

At the beginning of the new millennium, there were approximately 700 Beta Israel post-high school students in pre-college programmes, either before or after they had completed their military service (Gates to Jewish Heritage n.d., p. 4). This would allow them to complete the requirements for a *bagrut* certificate. There were about 400 Ethiopians in college and at university, mostly in the service professions such as social work and teaching. Yet, according to the Ministry of Education, 'Ethiopians have low learning abilities ... they do not improve regardless of how much the government invests in them'. Confronted with the prejudice inherent in this claim, the Ministry defended itself by saying: 'Researchers in both Israel and abroad have proven that there is a correlation between low socio-economic status and low academic ability' (cited in Mola 2002b, p. 1). Despite this, hundreds of Ethiopians throughout Israel have managed against all odds to be at the head of their classes. Mola's response is an appropriate one: 'When an educational system blames the children under its care rather than examining itself, it is moving in all the wrong directions' (Mola 2000b).

Social and economic conditions

The housing situation of Ethiopians in Israel has caused much resentment in the Beta Israel community. Many were housed initially in caravan sites in mobile homes of poor quality. By the mid-1990s, the Israeli government claimed that it was channelling resources into housing for Ethiopians who remained in temporary mobile homes (Netanyahu n.d., p. 2). The idea was that the Ethiopians living in mobile homes would be assisted to move into either public housing or permanent private housing.

By taking advantage of heavily subsidized mortgages, many of all Ethiopian families who lived in mobile homes were able to purchase their own homes in cities throughout Israel. Public housing was provided only for those families who, despite the special mortgages, still could not afford their own homes. It was hardly surprising in this context that, in 2002, 49% of Ethiopian families in public housing lived under cramped conditions with two or more people in each room (Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews [IAEJ], 2002a).

However, the housing issue was far from solved. Mortgages provided by the government for Ethiopian immigrants were later cut by approximately 4% (IAEJ 2002b, p. 2). In conjunction with the increase in the value of the US dollar, many Ethiopians began to experience great difficulty in purchasing permanent housing. It appears that in 2002 there were almost 6,000 Ethiopians who still resided in 'absorption' centres. Moreover, single Ethiopian immigrants (those without family) were promised caravans or hostels as temporary housing (IAEJ 2002b, p. 2). For many, this was an empty promise.

In addition to the ongoing housing problems, statistics on unemployment and poverty among the Beta Israel in Israel indicate that there was a huge discrepancy between the Beta Israel and the rest of the citizens of Israel. Mola, a representative of the IAEJ reported in 2002 that 47% of the Beta Israel between the ages of 25 and 34 years were not part of the labour force. Approximately 66% of families were

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

dependent on government welfare benefits in order to meet their basic needs. Ethiopians are certainly under-represented in government offices, and it is also significant that schools with good reputations have very low Ethiopian enrolment. There is a clear need to alter this reality and diminish existing social gaps (Mola 2002a, p. 1; Kaplan and Rosen 1993).

Moreover, 'critically high' levels of unemployment in general were reported as recently as 2002 (IAEJ 2002b, p. 1). Despite rising numbers of unemployed Ethiopian Jews, there was no attempt by the government to introduce measures to address the situation or to invest funds in providing feasible solutions. In spite of a conscious decision to absorb as many qualified Beta Israel as possible into government offices in 1997, the decision was never implemented. The IAEJ did suggest at a meeting on 3 September 2002 with Yuli Edelstein, the Deputy Minister of Absorption, that an employment placement project and special programmes to assist Ethiopian workers to develop small Ethiopian businesses should be created. Little has come of this initiative.

At that time, there were 29,000 Israeli students studying at technological colleges, but only 200 of these were of Ethiopian descent (IAEJ 2002b, p. 2). Graduates from these institutions have a high rate of 'absorption' into the mainstream Israeli workforce, with the result that it would be of great benefit if the Ethiopian community could increase their presence in this sector of education. The IAEJ recommended that Ethiopian students be encouraged to attend technological colleges, suggesting that their living support should be increased and they be given the opportunity to live in college-subsidized housing. It was also felt that they should be given the option of extending the learning period to three years, which would allow the participation of students from lower socio-economic groups who needed to work while they were studying.

In response, Edelstein agreed to establish a committee in his office to finance solutions to the employment problems faced by the Ethiopian immigrants (IAEJ 2002b, p. 2). Edelstein also guaranteed that he would investigate why the proportion of Ethiopian students in technological colleges was so low, and that he would work towards improving this situation. He also promised to open a discussion in the Knesset about why qualified Ethiopians were not given the opportunity to work in government offices. Follow-up meetings between representatives of the IAEJ and the deputy minister were envisaged. Of course, the question remains whether any of this would have been done had it not been for the efforts of the IAEJ.

The army is one of Israel's largest employers. Of all Ethiopians drafted into the army, over 36% serve in combat units, which is far above the national average:

The many Ethiopian casualties and heroes of the *intifada* exemplify the extent to which the Ethiopian community is embedded into the heart and soul of Israeli society. The battle against terror has amply demonstrated the self-sacrifice and Zionist idealism of the Ethiopian community. But at the very same time, the *intifada* has caused an economic recession that has deepened the absorption crisis of these immigrants. Preoccupied by security concerns, the government has, until now, failed to pay attention the warning signs that tell of a community poised on the precipice of poverty and disillusionment. (Mola 2002a, p. 1)

The survival of Israel depends on both internal and external security (Mola 2002a, p. 2). This implies that what is needed is the kind of solidarity that makes young Beta Israel volunteer for combat duty and risk their lives to protect the Jewish homeland. In truth, poverty, despair and prejudice are at the heart of this solidarity. The Israeli

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

army has always been seen as a national melting pot (Gur-arieh n.d., p. 1). However, Ethiopians say their dark skins and reserved manner in the face of garrulous and often assertive Israelis make their army service difficult.

One of the most prominent of the warning signs among this marginalized population has been the high rate of suicide among Beta Israel soldiers serving in the Israeli army. Suicide is unheard of in Ethiopia, except for honourable reasons such as defeat in battle. In Israel, more than 95% of Ethiopian 18-year-olds enlist for mandatory service, compared with a national average of 83% (Gur-arieh n.d., p. 1). Some Israeli Army spokespeople argue that the suicides are the result of family problems or other outside factors.

The status of the Falash Mura

Much of the controversy still surrounding the Falash Mura hinges upon the definition of what Judaism is and what it means to be a Jew and an Israeli. Judaism can be seen both as a religion and a nation or culture (Weiner 2004, p. 1). More than thirteen million people throughout the world have been identified as Jews, but the majority live in the USA (six million) and Israel (five million). The original name for the people now called Jews was 'Hebrew'. This is apparently derived from the name Eber, one of Abraham of the Bible's ancestors. According to another tradition, the derivation of the word 'Hebrew' is 'eyver', meaning 'the other side'. This refers to the fact that Abraham came from 'the other side' of the Euphrates River and was separated from the other nations of his time both morally and spiritually.

In Israel, many Israelis are described as secular. Despite this, according to Jewish Law (Halakha), a child born to a Jewish mother or an adult who has converted to Judaism is considered to be a Jew. One does not have to reaffirm one's Jewishness to be a Jew or practise any of the laws of the Torah to be Jewish. According to Reform Judaism, a person is a Jew if that person is born to either a Jewish mother or father and is raised to be Jewish. In the Orthodox movement, the father's religion and whether the person practises Judaism or not are immaterial. No affirmation or upbringing is needed, as long as the mother was Jewish (Weiner 2004, pp. 1–2).

The different movements within Judaism have different conversion practices. Conversion under an Orthodox rabbi requires the study of Judaism (*brit milah* for men, *mikvah* for both men and women), as well as a stated commitment to follow the laws of the Torah. Conversion in the Conservative movement entails the same requirements as in the Orthodox movement, while conversions under the Reform and other movements have different requirements. Because the conversion practices are not the same, many Orthodox Jews do not recognize Reform or Conservative conversions and do not consider the converts to be true Jews. Once a person has converted to Judaism he or she is not referred to by a special term. Such a person is as much a Jew as anyone born Jewish.

There are unquestionably many ways of becoming Jewish. Rather than quibbling about the details of what makes a person a Jew, the continued debate regarding the Falash Mura is better informed by taking note of their history, especially their recent history. For as long as they have had a collective memory, the Beta Israel have identified themselves as Jewish and have suffered persecution in Ethiopia for persisting in this identity (Edelstein 2002, p. 157). Many of the Falash Mura appear to have converted to Christianity not more than several generations ago. Even before

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Operation Solomon in 1991, a few hundred Falash Mura arrived in Israel with other Ethiopian immigrants (Sheleg 2003, p. 1). At the time they were not singled out as belonging to a different community. It was only after Operation Solomon that they became more visible and attracted attention as a subgroup. Some observers suggest that the Falash Mura were reluctant to immigrate to Israel under the highly risky circumstances surrounding Operation Solomon. These critics maintain that it was only when conditions within Ethiopia became even more unsettled and fraught with difficulty than the prospect of leaving their homeland that the Falash Mura began to emigrate.

The debate was fed by expert opinion. The controversy over the migration of the Falash Mura to Israel had always been rooted in history, but it now began to focus more narrowly on their ancient history. According to Steven Kaplan, a prominent scholar of Ethiopian Jewish history, a key argument is that the Falash Mura are not descended from the legendary Queen of Sheba (Sheleg 2003, p. 1). The claim that they are descended from the tribe of Dan and were exiled with the ten tribes of the Assyrian exile approximately 150 years before the destruction of the First Temple and the Judean exile, is, claims Kaplan (1998), equally inaccurate. He maintains that a more feasible explanation is that Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in approximately the fourth century CE. At roughly the same time, Jewish tribes living in the Arabian Peninsula arrived in Ethiopia. A unique culture arose, strongly bolstered by the Bible. Many Christians in Ethiopia were circumcised and observed the Sabbath. Approximately 500 years ago Ethiopia conquered tribes that had rebelled against Christian hegemony and these tribes then returned to a Jewish identity insofar as it was still known to them. These people were the Beta Israel, the people who later retained their distinctive Jewish identity. In time, however, they came under severe pressure to abandon their Jewish identity and over generations some did so. The pressure increased with the advent of European missionaries, who opposed an amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity. These were the predecessors of the Falash Mura.

Kaplan does not commit himself to the precise meaning of the term 'Falash Mura', but believes that Falasha, the name given to all Ethiopian Jewry, comes from the Hebrew *palshu* (invaded, squatted). This could refer to the fact that, as Jews, they were denied land of their own and became nomads or squatters. *Mura* is derived from the Hebrew for convert. Thus the expression Falash Mura can be loosely translated as 'nomadic' or 'squattling' converts. It is noteworthy that Kaplan believes that if the remaining 19,000 or 20,000 Falash Mura were to go to Israel, almost half the Ethiopian immigrant community in Israel would be Falash Mura (Sheleg 2003, p. 2, Kaplan 1992a, Kaplan 1998).

Although some experts claim that the Falash Mura were not forced to convert to Christianity, controversy surrounds their conversion in the sense that the word 'forced' is vaguely defined in such arguments. Kaplan does not believe that the Falash Mura were forced (as in 'put under extreme pressure') to convert to Christianity. He writes: 'At almost no stage were the Jews forced to convert. It was easier to live as a Christian, since the Jews were landless' (quoted in Sheleg 2003, p. 2). However, it should be recalled that as a result of their loss of land and the reduction of their income from both agriculture and construction, the Beta Israel in Ethiopia had little choice but to turn their endeavours to smithing, weaving and pottery, which were despised professions in the dominant society. Although in some cases the designation of the

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Beta Israel as *buda* (possessors of the 'evil eye') was applied to those who worked as smiths and potters and was more closely associated with some professions than others, the term eventually came to apply to all Beta Israel.

There is extensive evidence that in Ethiopia the Beta Israel have been (and still are) systematically deprived of land, reviled and discriminated against over a long period of time and have even been demonized. Many of them have been driven to outlying areas and forbidden to enter Christian villages. This weight of evidence renders it difficult to agree with Kaplan's statement that the Beta Israel have not been coerced to convert to Christianity. It is more realistic to posit that over the centuries they have been subjected to severe racial and cultural discrimination; this began even before their conquest by the Christians in Ethiopia, and it still continues today. The Falash Mura have succumbed to this pressure, whereas the Beta Israel have clung tenaciously to their faith.

The Falash Mura remained behind when all the Ethiopians who were recognized as Jews made *aliyah* in the 1980s and 1990s (Lipman 2003, pp. 1–2). Until recent years, when activists in the United States and Israel made the issue more visible, the Falash Mura were little known. Now, Jewish missions from the US and Israel regularly visit Ethiopia. Many Orthodox authorities are convinced that the Falash Mura are more authentically Jewish than the secular politicians who are passing judgment on their religious status. Supreme Court lawsuits have been brought by Michael Corinaldi, a Jerusalem attorney who wants the government to use the same standards for the immigration of the Falash Mura as it uses for newcomers from the former Soviet Union, whose numbers include a large percentage of non-Jewish relatives. This action, together with public demonstrations by Ethiopian Jews, has brought renewed hope that the waiting days in Ethiopia may soon be over for the Falash Mura.

The more tolerant approach eventually came to be the official viewpoint. On 16 February 2003, decades after the first Ethiopian Jews were permitted to go to Israel as recognized Jews, the Israeli cabinet decided unanimously to open Israel's gates to approximately 20,000 Ethiopians whose elders were Jewish (Brilliant 2003). The potential immigrants immediately affected by this decision included approximately 17,000 Falash Mura who had been living in a camp in Addis Ababa, some of them for as long as ten years. Throughout this long wait they had been supported by an American group, the North American Conference for Ethiopian Jewry. Between 3,000 and 4,000 other Falash Mura had been living in the northern town of Gondar.

Top rabbis in Israel and leaders of all three major Jewish religious streams in the United States agree that the Falash Mura should be treated as Jews, noting their adoption in recent years of an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle. This view appears to be somewhat insensitive to the counter-argument that the Falash Mura, if they were encouraged to express their *own forms* of Jewish belief, could enrich the Jewish faith in general, even if merely by serving as the basis of genuine debate. Tova Ellinson, a spokesperson for the Ministry of the Interior, stated unequivocally: 'They are Jews' descendants. That's clear' (Brilliant 2003).

But the debate does not end here. The head of the immigrants' umbrella organization, Addisu Messele, noted that many Jews in Ethiopia were being harassed and that some villagers had adopted Christianity to make their lives more bearable. At the same time, they were not fully accepted as Christians and suffered from almost the same discrimination as the Ethiopian Jews. Ethiopians are known to curse them and

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

call them 'traitors' for wanting to leave Ethiopia. A source in the Israeli Ministry of the Interior has intimated that the government's idea as regards this group was to accept their claim that they are Jewish and take them to Israel 'gradually' and 'quietly' so that the Ethiopian government would not complain (Brilliant 2003).

However, almost immediately, the momentous decision to admit the Falasha Mura began to suffer setbacks. A little-noticed clause in the Israeli cabinet resolution sparked debate among American Jewish groups on how much aid should be sent to the Ethiopians (Eden 2003, p.1). The clause called for an increase in the humanitarian assistance to members of the community. Supporters of the Falash Mura circulated an unofficial translation of the cabinet decision that appeared to implicate two relief organizations based in the United States, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry. An alternative unofficial translation, however, did not mention these organizations by name.

If the official version of the cabinet decision requested American Jewish groups to increase assistance, this would indicate a decided shift in policy for the Israeli government, which had previously asked relief organizations to stop supplying direct aid to the Falash Mura (Eden 2003, p.1). The new shift would increase financial pressure on the JDC and the network of North American charitable organizations. The Jewish Agency and the JDC at that stage received more than \$200 million annually from United Jewish Communities, the controlling body of the North American network of charitable Jewish federations. But in recent years, ostensibly following orders from Jerusalem, the federations and their overseas partners have provided only limited assistance to the Falash Mura, despite pleas from religious authorities in America and Israel.

At present, the Falash Mura form the bulk of those Ethiopian Jews still waiting to emigrate to Israel and are seen by many as the final group of Ethiopians who will be permitted to go to Israel. Although many of these people have spent long years as refugees under calamitous conditions, the issue appears to have lost some of its sting. While this gives hope to the Falash Mura, their struggle is not yet over, although some analysts have claimed that the end is in sight.

The Israeli Minister of the Interior, Eli Yishai, stated recently that he would ask the government to expedite the emigration of Falash Mura who could show a Jewish connection on their mother's side (Lipman 2003, p.2). According to the Law of Return, this would affect several thousand members of the Falash Mura community, who would immediately become citizens. Those related to Jews on their father's side may be eligible to settle in Israel under a separate family reunification law.

Despite this, there remains a need for greater urgency and a broader scope for immigration from Ethiopia. Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest nations and faces regular famine in the aftermath of drought and poor harvests. The Falash Mura are among Ethiopia's most poverty-stricken citizens. Officials from both the JDC and the Jewish Agency have blamed the Israeli government for its slow rate of evaluating and processing the immigration requests of those still in Ethiopia. The JDC in particular has taken issue with the Israeli government's past pattern of endless delays. Once the Ethiopians' applications have been approved, the officials have said, the Falash Mura will be eligible for further aid while they await emigration. It is however felt that until the application process has been completed by the Interior Ministry, increased humanitarian assistance would only raise the expectations of

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

those Ethiopians whose requests may be turned down. It was also suggested that such assistance could increase what is alleged to be a high number of false claims to Jewish descent. This allegation appears to have some credence, with sceptics claiming that even Ethiopians with no Jewish connections at all in Israel are eager to claim Jewish roots in order to escape the poverty in Ethiopia.

Continued racial and cultural discrimination

That the Beta Israel in Israel still face daunting challenges in Israel is underscored by their multi-faceted protest actions in recent years. Ethiopian activists and their allies are protesting against the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency for Israel and several American Jewish philanthropic bodies (Cattan 2003). In one such demonstration thousands of people in Jerusalem pitched tents outside the prime minister's office to protest the apparent collapse of a government plan to bring the Falash Mura to Israel. Protesters also object to what they claim is the failure of Jewish federations and their main overseas partners, the Jewish Agency and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, to supply adequate aid to the impoverished Falash Mura still waiting in Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, Israel-based Ethiopian activists have accused the JDC and Jewish Agency of racial discrimination for spending more to aid Russian and Argentine communities than they have given to the starving Falash Mura in Ethiopia (Cattan 2003). The JDC and the Jewish Agency have hotly denied that their policies have been in any way discriminatory.

Not surprisingly, numerous analysts are still asking whether it is racism that lies behind the slow acceptance of the Falash Mura. Among these is Lipman (2003, p. 3). In an interview conducted by Lipman, a respondent named Neguise reacted by saying that he did not like to use the word 'racism'. Significantly he went in to say that the small number of Ethiopian Jews who went to Israel arrived with few marketable skills, and further, that: 'The politicians are not interested in the Falash Mura cause ... because we are not white, we are not educated, we are not rich. They prefer to see white engineers rather than blacks' (cited in Lipman 2003, p. 3).

Two years previously, critics were claiming that racism lay behind the Israeli government's determination of a 400-person per month quota on immigration from Ethiopia, even for those who qualified under the Law of Return (Eden 2001, p. 1). Activists on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry complained that the quota and what they called 'a lack of humanitarian aid from American Jewish philanthropies [were] doubly offensive because of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recent calls for a mass migration of Jews from Argentina, France, Australia and South Africa'. Moreover, the activists claimed that the plight of the Ethiopians was being ignored even as Israel and the quasi-governmental Jewish Agency for Israel, the main overseas recipient of money raised by federations within the United Jewish Communities system, were investing millions of dollars to encourage immigration from those countries and the former Soviet Union. This was the first time that a quota had been instituted on an ethnic basis. They pronounced loud and clear: 'It is clear discrimination against black Jews' (Eden 2001, p. 1).

The accusations of racial, cultural and ethnic discrimination in Israel against the Beta Israel have persisted for too long to be ignored. In fact, the information gleaned thus far on the Beta Israel indicates without doubt that elements of discrimination

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

are still at work in Israel, both in the government and the population at large. The question asked by Kolinsky (2003) continues to reverberate: what does the idea of a 'Jewish homeland' mean? In view of the high, but drastically dashed hopes the Beta Israel had fostered for their new livelihood in Israel, and after suffering so much for so many years, Kolinsky's call for a re-evaluation and re-examination of what the idea of a 'Jewish homeland' means, appears to be one of the few ideas that makes sense in this quagmire of debate and delay. Ultimately, what appears to be in question here is the meaning of Jewish nationhood for the government and citizens of Israel.

Religious stress

Even today, the Beta Israel appear to be struggling to find religious acceptance in Israel. While some of the problems of their religious recognition have been solved, they are still striving to establish some of the more distinctive aspects of their own form of Judaism in Israel. This is typical of immigrant groups today. Such groups often face the challenge of maintaining their own cultural continuity and identity in an increasingly globalized world (Edelstein 2002, p. 154). Much of the controversy in the religious adjustment of the Beta Israel in Israel appears to hinge on the Ethiopian community in Israel's attempts to gain acceptance of their *zar* spirit belief system.

Zar spirit beliefs may help the Ethiopian Jewish community in general to adjust to religious practices in Israel. At the same time these beliefs must be recognized as controversial when seen from an Israeli or even a Christian perspective, although they do not seem to clash with the basic precepts of either. This makes *zar* a pivotal concept in contests over the Judaic ethno-religious identity of Ethiopian Jews. The value of *zar* appears to lie in its social, cultural and religious functions. *Zar* articulates ethnic identities and shared identity, transcending the uncertainties and hybrid cultural phenomena experienced by Ethiopian immigrants in Israel (Edelstein 2002, p. 155).

As for what *zar* involves, a legend known to Ethiopian Jews among others is that which tells of the 30 children of Adam and Eve. Attempting to protect her 15 most beautiful children from divine envy, Eve tried to hide them in the Garden of Eden, out of God's sight. God was all-seeing and was angered by Eve's action. He declared that the 15 unhidden children would become the ancestors of humanity, while those whom Eve had hidden, the 'invisible' children, would become the forefathers of a category of envious and unpredictable spirits known as *zar*. From that time forward, human beings have been plagued by the capricious nature of the *zar*, being subjected to illness and misfortune at the jealous whim of the spirits.

In areas where *zar* is present, women past the age of puberty are the majority of sufferers. Possession by a *zar* spirit is identified through physiological symptoms, including most commonly headaches, lethargy or infertility, which cannot be cured by healers or bio-medical doctors. Once the illness is diagnosed as *zar*, therapy begins with an initiation ceremony of the afflicted individual into a cult group of others who have suffered similar ailments. The initiate attends a *zar* ceremony where she will hopefully fall into a trance, allowing the *zar* spirit to enter her body and reveal its identity and wishes to the other participants through movement and speech. The spirit is not exorcised. Rather, a relationship is developed with the spirit in order to prevent future occurrences of the illness.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Zar illness and therapy can therefore become a method of coping with disruption, whether the disruption is defined physiologically, psychologically, socially or supernaturally. For instance, it can be expected that *zar* spirit possession may intensify in the face of disruptions inherent in immigrant and refugee status. Similar spirit phenomena are a prominent feature of Christian–Jewish relationships in Ethiopia. Social separation of the two groups is perpetuated by a combination of mutually supporting phenomena: economic specialization, Beta Israel purity laws and Ethiopian Christian beliefs in a class of vampire-like spirits called *buda*. *Zar* systems developed concurrently with these other elements. *Zar* spirits today continue to reflect ideas about the differences in identity between the Ethiopian Jews and their Christian, Muslim and pagan neighbours (Edelstein 2002, p. 156).

Mainstream Judaism is not specifically opposed to the existence of *zar* spirits or to similar practices that do not interfere with Jewish law. Beta Israel religious practices are based strictly on the five books of Moses (the *Torah* or *Orit*, as the Ethiopian Jewish version is called). In order to affirm their identity as Jews and thereby secure their position as citizens of Israel, Ethiopian Jews have been challenged to reconcile contradictions between their traditional practice of Judaism and the prevailing form of observance in Israel. *Zar* beliefs are interwoven in this ongoing tussle and although the Ethiopian priesthood is officially opposed to spirit possession, they have, unofficially, shown signs of acceptance (Edelstein 2002, pp. 160, 163). Edelstein argues compellingly that *zar* does not compete with Judaism, but is rather a set of beliefs emerging at the crossroads between the invisible and the visible, that is, the social, natural and supernatural worlds (Edelstein 2002, p. 166).

The fact that the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel has continued to observe their unique religious holidays affirms their desire to be recognized as a distinct sub-culture with long-standing, valid traditions. It also affirms their determination to retain the beliefs and practices developed in Ethiopia, despite pressures to assimilate in Israel. Non-Ethiopian Israelis do not attend Beta Israel traditional gatherings, but despite the lack of interest there is also a general degree of tolerance (Edelstein 2002, p. 163).

The nature of the imagined Jewish homeland

More than a decade after the dramatic migrations of Jews from Ethiopia in Operation Moses (1984) and Operation Solomon (1991), the Ethiopian community in Israel still faces serious challenges:

They are suffering from poverty, alienation and most importantly, lack of educational rights. At present, thousands are not able to integrate into the Israeli educational system and society and thus remain marginalized, alienated and isolated. Most problematic of all the educational issues facing the Ethiopian community today is that as a result of the discrimination they face, almost 15% of the youth have simply given up and dropped out of school. As such, there are approximately 2,000 Ethiopian youth on the streets without any education, employment, or social framework. (Kolinsky 2003, p. 2)

For Kolinsky, it is

all too easy to dismiss the statistics as meaningless, as yet another immigrant population struggling to integrate into Israeli culture. For me however, the numbers are real ... I have heard countless racial slurs, talked to Ethiopian youth about their experiences, worked one-on-one and in group settings with Ethiopian children and teens, been invited into people's hearts and homes, danced at an Ethiopian wedding, prepared caravans for new immigrants and stood in protest with Ethiopians at the Knesset

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

demanding that Israel bring Jews from the Quara region in Ethiopia. I have had the privilege of working with the first Ethiopian lawyer in Israel, the first Israeli-born Ethiopian and some of the brightest and most creative Ethiopian Jews whose success stories are testimony to the potential of the community. They are humble people who have dedicated their life's work to providing innovative educational opportunities for Ethiopian youth and preventing the development of a black underclass in Israel. (Kolinsky 2003, pp. 2–3)

This leads Kolinsky to claim that it is simply not enough to put equal access to education on the social and political agenda. Rather, a re-evaluation and re-examination of what the idea of a 'Jewish homeland' means is required. She is ashamed of a Jewish homeland which prevents an Ethiopian child from going to school with other Israeli children. The only way to achieve a better future for the Ethiopian community in Israel is through celebrating the Ethiopian community's presence in Israel by acknowledging that: 'the Ethiopian community has a rich culture deserving of a voice in the Jewish state. The experiences of Ethiopian youth need to be reflected in education and Israeli social practices. A forum for dialogue must be put in place so that the voices of Ethiopian youth can be heard' (Kolinsky 2003, p. 3).

Kolinsky appears to be pleading for a basic change in the imagined Israeli state. For her, the Israeli state should accommodate other cultural contributions, thereby becoming enriched and culturally enlarged. This appears to be a direct contradiction of the so-called 'civilizing mission' approach of European Jews such as Halévy and Faitlovitch in the previous century – an approach that still seems to guide the attitudes and interaction of many Israelis, both at official and informal levels, towards Beta Israel.

What, then, is one to make of the evidence gathered here? It indicates that successive Israeli governments have spent a great deal of money, time and effort to bring Ethiopian Jews to Israel and to help them integrate into Israeli society. And furthermore the government has given special attention to the young people among Ethiopian Jews in Israel. As a result, the position of Ethiopian Jews in Israel has gradually improved over the years.

The programmes designed to facilitate integration of the Ethiopian community into Israeli life have achieved limited success; among these have been the crucial yet controversial education issue, which has raised the possibility that a perpetual Beta Israel underclass may be developing in Israel. Despite the government's best efforts, the Ethiopian community in Israel to this day faces serious and often almost insurmountable integration dilemmas. These include drastic differences between the socio-economic and educational circumstances of the Beta Israel and those of other Israeli citizens. These are the result of continuing racial and cultural discrimination against the Beta Israel in their new homeland; they have created a serious situation and entirely new ways of addressing the problem need to be found. A complete redefinition is required on what 'the Jewish homeland' means.

The impossible return of the Beta Israel: where to now?

The Beta Israel diasporas or movements back and forth from Ethiopia and Israel are motivated by religious, political and economic quests for enduring identities. So complex are these constant struggles to survive in what is basically a hostile environment that the historical options that the Beta Israel have adopted are

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

articulated at various levels. Because diaspora is not only caused by involuntary factors, the Beta Israel are obliged to seek for permanent residence in Israel in search of better economic opportunities that hold promise for the future. Those of the Beta Israel who are highly skilled and who 'make it' in Israel are likely to adopt the country as their 'final' home. But this option has not stopped the Beta Israel from imagining Ethiopia as either their first or second home to the extent of remitting cash back to family members in Ethiopia or investing in the volatile Ethiopian markets. Some Beta Israelis who reside permanently in Israel make spiritual and religious pilgrimages each year to Ethiopia to affirm their Ethiopian-ness. Similarly, those of the Beta Israel still resident in Ethiopia have different attitudes to Ethiopia; some have come to terms with the fact that one can still be a Jew even if one lives in Ethiopia. And yet others have made real and physical relocations to Israel. The constant 'returns' to Ethiopia or to Israel are in fact made possible by the Beta Israelis' conscious and sometimes unconscious acceptance of double consciousness as a survival strategy. This enables them to be Ethiopian, but at the same time be Jews; Jews who can enjoy the same legal rights as those in Israel. The paradox of the 'returns' to either Ethiopia or Israel by those who feel 'trapped' in lifelong diaspora is that it is never completely achieved as a stable identity.

Conclusion

It should be recalled that the Beta Israel are a proud people with a rich history. Their culture has survived for many centuries in the face of fierce conflict and persecution. In the markets and streets of Tel Aviv and other Israel cities to which the Beta Israel are scattered, they have continued to simulate an imagined Africa, shot through with the hope of fulfilled lives in Israel. Beta Israel have carried portable aspects of their culture and artifacts from Ethiopia. They display their art in Israel and continue to recreate their deferred dreams through their artistic creativity. A change in the Israeli approach to Beta Israel integration, more tolerance of cultural difference, seems little enough to ask in exchange for Beta Israel survival. In the present world order, history and culture are increasingly becoming lost to a bland, impoverished and US-dominated 'global culture'; even languages (the prime carriers of individual cultures) are dying out at an alarming rate. Under these circumstances, the Israeli 'civilizing mission' towards the Beta Israel seems increasingly inappropriate and destructive.

Although years of inhumane integration have passed, all is not lost for the Beta Israel if Israeli inflexibility is tempered. With a greater role of their own to play in their adaptation to conditions in Israel and increased recognition by Israel of Beta Israel culture, the position of this threatened group of people may yet improve. What appears to be needed most is for Israel to recognize the human agency of the Beta Israel; their ability to enrich the culture of Israel while at the same time expanding their own unique Beta Israel culture within the more modern Israeli society.

One significant criterion for evaluating the success of democratic rule in any country is the government's responsiveness to the individual needs of its citizens, no matter how small a minority they may represent. In fact, the treatment of minorities in democracies has sometimes even been touted as the state's 'degree of civilization'. While Israel has always claimed to be a democratic country, in view of what has been discussed in this article there appears to be an untoward intolerance towards citizens that have joined them from other countries.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The potential of Beta Israel contribution to Israeli society at all levels, among others through better education and training made available to them in Israel, should be recognized. The world will be the poorer if this does not happen. Should it not, the responsibility for the cultural death of an ancient and courageous people will rest squarely on Israel's conscience and that of humanity in general. There are many other cultures that are under threat as globalization marches on. It may be appropriate at this time for the dominant world powers and those under cultural threat, to consider more specific, focused programs to preserve and where possible even re-activate cultural awareness among the culturally threatened peoples of the world. The case of the Beta Israel in Israel serves as a prime example illustrating this deep-seated and ever-expanding need.

Much remains to be done in order to accommodate the Beta Israel, both in Israel and in Ethiopia, where a new government has taken the place of the oppressive Mengistu Haile Mariam regime. Ultimately, if the Beta Israel culture is to be prevented from dying out, the authorities in both Israel and Ethiopia may have to consider the possibility of seeking closer ties between the Beta Israel and their undeniable historical home in Ethiopia. However, one should not underestimate the immensity of such an initiative. If it is true that the state of Israel needs to undergo a change of heart in the imagining of its own statehood in order for the Beta Israel to become fully accepted in Israel, the same can be said of Ethiopia.

The potential of Beta Israel contributions to Israeli society at all levels should be recognized. At the same time, the Beta Israel may now be better able to contribute to the social life of Ethiopia. There appears to be no objective reason why they should remain in extreme isolation from their fellow Ethiopians. Modern communication and the fact that their plight in Israel is now well known in many parts of the world, especially among world Jewry, militate against such isolation. Much appears to depend on the governments of both countries and the lead they take in making this happen.

The aim of this paper was to problematize the existence of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel. It was argued that the Beta Israel can with justification be described as people in diaspora. This diasporic status means different things to different Beta Israelis. It was argued that even now, at the dawn of the new millennium, the slow progress made by the Beta Israel in their struggle to become an integral part of Israel undoubtedly calls into question the chances of survival of Beta Israel culture. The Beta Israel can no longer return on a permanent basis to Ethiopia. And there are still thousands of Ethiopians who are prospective emigrants to Israel, although it is becoming ever more difficult for their hopes to be realized. Diaspora can, however, enable the Beta Israelis to mobilize diverse identities, and these do not have to be stable or complete for the Beta Israel to be classified as Jews. The incompleteness of Beta Israel identities is hinted at in the title of this paper. It suggests that it is impossible for the Beta Israel to look back in the expectation of salvaging their past identities intact. The best that the Beta Israel can hope for is to discuss their struggles in terms that suggest a movement 'closer' to their previous identities.

If the phrase 'the impossible return' strikes readers as pessimistic, this is by no means intended. In fact, the opposite is true. By seeking to return to Ethiopia, Beta Israelis may imagine a coherent cultural wholeness for the Ethiopian state which had not previously been present and is impossible to attain, because Ethiopia is also

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

characterized by its own intractable political, cultural and economic difficulties, making it a less likely place of return for a people who are struggling against various forms of discrimination in heartland Israel. What is indeed possible about the 'impossibility' of a return to an intact identity is the acquisition of knowledge that enables Beta Israel to survive in Ethiopia and Israel with new insight on the existential realities of betrayal, and resistance to different forms of tyrannies. Put differently, what is 'impossible–possible' for the Beta Israel is to look back to the past like the proverbial Ghanaian Sankofa bird, and retrieve usable elements of that past in order to confront the present and forge ahead with lives lived in contradictory terms.

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Who is Amhara?

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Ethiopia is home to many ethnic groups and nationalities, yet some have more recognition than others and some traditionally see themselves as superior to others. Before the 1974 revolution, discussions on ethnicity and nationalism were confined to certain groups of student unions and radical groups in exile, particularly in Europe and North America. After 1991 the current regime brought the subject of ethnicity into the open. The central argument of this article is to question and define the ethnic group Amhara. Some identify Amhara and national consciousness. However, others still argue, as long as the Amharic language exists, Amhara exists as a distinct ethnic group. This paper will examine Amhara identity and Ethiopian nationalism in Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

Historical context

Although Ethiopians can trace their collective history back more than two thousand years, ‘what is known as the modern state did not begin to come into view until the mid 1800s’ (Keller 2006, p. 87). During the ‘Zemene Mesafint’ or Prince’s era Tewodros tried to create a unified Ethiopia by conquering the kingdoms in northern Ethiopia. In addition, ‘the formation of the modern state contemporaneously coincided with the European scramble for Africa’ (Keller 2006, p. 87). After the mid-1800s four consecutive kings Tewodros I, Yohannes IV, Menelik II and Haile Selassie I attempted to consolidate territorial boundaries of the state of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is not a product of colonial rule. As Clapham (1988, p. 54) puts it: ‘both state and nation have indigenous points of reference. They are not merely, as is often the case elsewhere in Africa, alien ideas imported and imposed by external colonialism.’ And yet, agricultural life and trade in the highlands and the long history of the Christian kingdom played a significant role in creating some kind of commercial relationship among them. At times they united to fight expansionist invading forces, but at others they fought each other for regional power.

In North Ethiopia, the highlands of Eritrea and Tigray are currently occupied by the Tigrayans and others. The Amhara, to the south, are in the majority in the highlands of Wollo, Gonder, Gojam and northern Shoa. Further south, Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group is found: the Oromo and the Southern Nations. These three major ethnic groups have not always lived under the same rule. The oldest major kingdom, Aksum, had only Eritrea and Tigray as its regions. The Zagwe kingdom in

north central Ethiopia that followed Aksum, controlled a limited part of northern Ethiopia. However, it is the Shoan Solomonic dynasty by the late twelfth century from northern Shoa (Amhara)¹ that expanded towards the south and central Ethiopia and conquered regions occupied by various ethnic and religious groups. By the end of the nineteenth century the Amhara king called Menelik II (again from the mythical Solomonic dynasty) became the strongest man in Ethiopia, possessing considerable numbers of firearms and enjoying military power.

Menelik expanded southwards and took a large Oromo land mass. By the early nineteenth century, the current Ethiopian physiognomy had crystallised. Dominated by the Amhara of Shoa, the state continued its conquest of all other groups.

The creation of a professional army and a new system of bureaucratic administration gave the Ethiopian state recognition among the subjects and other states. 'Significantly the modern state of Ethiopia began to emerge at a time when the Westphalian model of state organisation was spreading throughout the world. In the process, state boundaries became fixed and accepted legally in international law' (Keller 2006, pp. 86–87). Moreover kings and heads of principalities attempted to impose a sense of collective identity on a single nation.

However, these attempts failed to develop a multi-ethnic unitary state in which all citizens felt part of the nation state rather than of their particular ethnic group. One reason for this is that there was no clear sense of ethnic national identity. The centre–periphery government structure has always been contested by ethnic groups other than the Amhara. The question of ethnic equality has never been answered.

Ethnicity and nationalism: Ethiopian discourse

In considering the cultural terms in which political participation is the passport to membership of the 'nation', the significance of ethnicity is identified as the most potent force for political mobilisation (Salih and Markakis 1998, p. 7). Ethnicity and its corollary, 'culture', is a political force when groups such as the Oromo with 'distinctive cultural features or customary behaviours ... have morally binding aspects which being held in common give a pan-Oromo cultural identity' (Baxter 1998, p. 50). It is this cohesion within an ethnically defined polity that challenges the formation of the wider polity of Ethiopia. Many feel that it will be 'impossible for Ethiopia to pursue an ethnification process ... and to promote democracy at the same time' (Poluha 1998, p. 39).

Within Ethiopia, several ethnically identifiable peoples assert their ethnic identity, not as part of a cohering nation-building enterprise but, on the contrary, to seek a collective identity that will ultimately be recognised as a sovereign nation-state.² Others, the Tigray among them, limit their aspirations to 'national emancipation within the imperial state'. After decades of uncertainty, the Oromo people are now 'confirmed and comfortable in their identity which is probably why they can afford to have disagreements among themselves' (Baxter 1998, p. 58).

Division of interests within ethnic identities disrupt coherence at a national level. Other sectional interests however also disrupt the ethnic agenda as ethnicity is neither a bounded entity, nor is it static. Language, religion and class interests remain significant factors. The pursuit of ethnicity as a concept and as primary identity is a 'class and intellectual process rather than nationwide across Ethiopia and is clearly relative to its value as an asset in the struggle for access to scarce resources' (Poluha 1998, p. 36).

Defining 'Amhara'

The term 'Amhara' has a variety of confusing definitions and descriptions. Although Amhara exists as an identity, it represents multiple ethnicities with a varied national consciousness. However, some reject this concept and argue that Amhara exists as a distinctive ethnic group with a specific located boundary. Others in the Ethiopian polity maintain that the Amharas are an oppressor group who conquered most of Ethiopia.

How have the Amhara managed to dominate Ethiopian history and state power for the past millennium? The term 'Amhara' is ambiguous in referring to class, ethnic, cultural or geographical boundaries. However, does this refer to people from northern Shoa, rural Gondar, central Gojjam, or urban dwellers from Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Dire Dawa or Awasa? What are the criteria for being an Amhara? Does it depend on one's name, or religion and faith, or descent? Is Amhara identity always associated with Ethiopian nationalism? If so, why is this the case?

In 1992–1993, shortly after the collapse of the Marxist government in Ethiopia, a heated debate took place in Addis Ababa on the question of the existence of the Amhara as a distinct ethnic group. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Andreas Eshete have argued that as long as the Amharic language exists, Amhara exists as an ethnic group. Thus the Amhara should thus be treated as a distinct ethnic group with a certain ethnic territory of its own. This interpretation may work for the rural Amhara in some parts of Ethiopia. However, a group of scholars from Addis Ababa University, led by Mesfin Woldemariam, has claimed that Amhara is the centre of the Ethiopian nation and should be allowed to live freely in any part of the country without any restricted boundary. Unfortunately, this debate ended without clarification of the identity of Amhara. Both groups failed to comprehend the multiple identities of Amhara.

The derivation of the name 'Amhar' is also contested among scholars. Kassate Berhan Tessema, in his Amharic dictionary (1951 EC)³ claims that the word 'Amhara' comes from the Ethiopian word *amari*, meaning 'pleasing, agreeable, beautiful and gracious' (also *mehare*, gracious, containing the same '*m-h-r*' root as the verb to learn, my translation). Other scholars see it as an ethnic name that can be linked back to the Himyarites, or claim that it derives from 'Ge'ez', meaning 'free people' (or *am*, meaning 'people', and *hara*, meaning 'free' or 'soldier'). There are also those such as Donald Levine (1974) who have dismissed this latter derivation as folk etymology. The most credible explanation is that the name of the language comes from the medieval province of Amhara, located in central Ethiopia in the present Amhara region and the pre-1995 province of Wollo.

In a televised speech in 1991, shortly before the collapse of his government, Mengistu Haile Mariam also tried to define the term Amhara by saying that it (Amhara) consists of a Hebrew term *am*, which means 'people', and *hara* that means 'mountain'. He then argues that Amhara means 'people who live under the mountain'.

Alaka Tayya Gabra Maryam (1987), an Ethiopian evangelist and historian of the nineteenth century, suggests that the ancestors of Amhara and Tigre are the same: they both are sons of Yoktan and grandsons of Shem. On one hand, Maryam argues that 'the conclusive evidence which shows that the Amhara people are of the race of the tribe of Shem, the descendant of Yoktan and the lineage of Israel, is their bearing, customs, appearance, names, place names, and their language'. On the other hand, he argues that Amhara is a mixed group:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Chawa and *balage* or *balagar* are distinct things. *Balage* means a possessor of property (*rist*) or land. Chawa is the king's soldier – subject. He the kings have the habit of mixing the tribe with another tribe ... Many kinds of nobility, the origin of which is unknown, have in this way been established in Ethiopia. Even some Galla⁴ are being duly termed *chawa* and are included among the lords established over the peasants. (Maryam 1987, pp.28–29)

This view is based primarily on the origin of Amhara that is interpreted through scriptures in the Holy Bible, chronicles and other religious books. While I sympathise with Maryam's definition of Amhara as a compound group I believe a historical and geographical reference is required – clear evidence which locates the origin of the Amhara people. Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, Amhara was only used (in the form *amariñña*) to refer to Amharic, the language, or the medieval province located in Wollo (the present Amhara region). Today, most people labelled by outsiders as Amhara, refer to themselves simply as Ethiopian, or to their province (e.g. Gojjame from the province Gojjam). Amharic-speaking Shoans consider themselves closer to non-Amharic-speaking Shoans than to Amharic-speakers from distant regions like Gondar. Amharic-speakers tend to be a 'supra-ethnic group' comprised of multiple subgroups (Levine 1974, p.66). Similarly, Takkele Tadesse also describes the identity of Amhara, by saying:

The Amhara can thus be said to exist in the sense of being a fused stock, a supra-ethnically conscious ethnic Ethiopian serving as the pot in which all the other ethnic groups are supposed to melt. The language, Amharic, serves as the center of this melting process ...thus, Amhara does not exist, in the sense of being a distinct ethnic groupthose who affirm the existence of the Amhara as a distinct ethnic group, therefore, is that it (Amhara) should be dislodged from the position of supremacy and each ethnic group should be freed from Amhara domination to have equal status with everybody else. (Tadesse 1994, p. 185)

Amhara is the second largest ethnic group in Ethiopia – amounting to a far greater number of people than could possibly have originated from the tiny 'province of Amhara' in Wollo. Instead, Amhara has for four centuries been a culture of assimilation. The language and the culture of the imperial court was Amharic, from the time of the reign of Yikuno Amlak in 1270 and the 'Solomonic line' of kings emanating from the historical Shoa province. From that time onwards whoever wanted to advance in the administration, whoever had ambition in the court or in the military of the emperors, had to speak Amharic. The court retained an Amharic culture, but attracted ambitious individuals and bright young men from other ethnic groups, provided they volunteered to adapt to the language and the customs at the court. This also included adopting the Orthodox Christian religion. So Amharic became the culture of assimilation. But it was also the court culture of an elite group, and it installed in its bearers a consciousness of superiority. This is clearly seen in twentieth-century court culture; Amhara became the culture of an educated elite. To advance in administration one had to be educated and those who had an Amharic education had the best chance of administrative advancement. As Tegegne Teka claims: 'Amhara is of Ethiopian nationalities as defined on the basis of language. The present Amhara state comprises the Amharic-speaking people of Ethiopia, who are not necessarily an indigenous people, who always spoke Amharic' (Teka 1998, p.119).

However, scholars from other ethnic groups, such as Oromo and the Southern Nations, contest these definitions or descriptions of Amhara and suggest that Amhara

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

exists as a distinct ethnic group and is a dominating and oppressive class. For the past millennium the Abyssinian/Ethiopian state has identified with the Amhara ruling class and this has led to Amhara defining itself through Ethiopian nationalism.

All Amhara or all Ethiopian?

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government encourages Ethiopian nationals to organise according to their ethnic affiliation. Amhara nationalism thus reasserted itself as Ethiopian nationalism. Andargachew Tsige, a former member of the EPRDF/EPDM (Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement), who published a book in Amharic about organising Amhara on ethnic lines, is quoted by Teka as saying:

Today politics in Ethiopia is based on ethnicity. There are ethnic groups that have very strong ethnic sentiments and very strong ethnic-based political organisations ... in the face of this reality, those ethnic groups that are not organised, like the Amhara, will become underdogs and trail behind ... what must the Amhara do surmount this problem? The only way out is to organise on the basis of ethnicity. (quoted in Teka 1998, p. 73)

According to this argument the new principle of ethnic federalism meant that Amhara identity had no other option but to organise along ethnic lines. Centuries of domination by the state bureaucracy and other institutions came to an end for Amhara after the Tigre-dominated government controlled Addis Ababa in 1991.

Amhara identity in question

Over the past 15 years the issue of Amhara identity has become increasingly complex, not only in Ethiopia but also among the Ethiopians who live abroad in the diaspora. Exiles who opposed the Derg and its opponents in the late 1980s found themselves in uncharted territory. They felt that their own narrative construction of identity was threatened in battles between those who controlled Ethiopia and those who sought to divide it.

Prior to the 1974 revolution the discourse on identity, nationality and ethnicity was severely restricted as sometimes seen as treason. This discussion was initiated by the student movement and has been very divisive. Within the student movement ethnicity and identity took centre stage in the debate, which in many ways was the forerunner of the future polity. As the question of identity and ethnicity is real, ideas regarding ethnicity, identity and nationality should be discussed openly and democratically. We must face the past and explore the true nature of ethnicity; this will allow us to achieve a better society by managing conflict and differences.

Amhara identity has been shaped throughout the centuries by migration, intermarriage, language and culture compositions with other ethnic groups. The *wattadar* or soldiers of the kings of those days did not only originate from Amhara communities. In addition, the Oromo migrations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played a significant role in shaping the identity of today's Amhara.

Oromo migration and its effect on Amhara identity

Donald Levine (1974, p. 78) argues that Oromos were originally from the southern part of Ethiopia and that by the 1500s they invaded Shoa and undertook a

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

devastating raid to Harar region. At the same time other Oromo groups travelled further afield to the northern Amhara region of Gojam and Begemdir. Still others invaded the western regions expanding to the Great Rift Valley.

At this particular point one may ask why the Oromo failed to conquer the whole of Ethiopia as did the Abyssinians. Why did they not form a centralised monarch or a strong ruler under their Gadda system?⁵ The answer is simple: in contrast to the Amhara expansion, the timing and style of the Oromo expansions were not calculated to extend political domination. The Oromo did not seek to gain recognition for a central authority, to collect tribute, or to impose a national religious culture. Their expansion was triggered by two motives: a need to carry out ritually prescribed military expeditions against enemies; and a search for new land. Moreover, instead of imposing their own culture and political ideology, Oromos tended to assimilate the cultures of those whom they invaded.

These migrations also profoundly affected the Oromo. Disunited in the extreme, they attacked and raided each other almost as readily as they did neighbouring peoples in their quest for new land and pastures. As they moved further from their homeland and encountered new physical and human environments, entire segments of the Oromo population adapted by changing their mode of economic life, their political and social organisation, and their religious adherence. Many mixed with the Amhara (particularly in Shoa), became Christians, and eventually acquired a share in governing the kingdom. In some cases, royal family members came from the union of Amhara and Oromo elements. In other cases Oromo, without losing their identity, became part of the nobility.

As Tekletsadik (1964, p. 47) notes in his book *Ya Ethiopia Tarik* (A history of Ethiopia), Emperor Haile Selassie's mother, Woz Yeshimebet, was of Gurage ethnic origin with no Amhara ancestry. Menelik II, also known as strong unifier and father of the contemporary Ethiopian nation, claimed direct descent from King Solomon of Israel. Although Menelik claimed his royal bloodline through his father, Hailemelekot Sahile Selassie, there is no precise source on the identity of his mother. As Marcus suggests, 'it is probably safe to conclude that Ejigayahu's [Menelik's mother's] origins were very humble indeed. There are even persistent rumours that she was a Gurage slave' (Marcus 1995, p. 17).

Yet no matter how they have been subordinated and given a minor role in the history of contemporary Ethiopia by the north Abyssinian rulers, the Oromo as a nation within Ethiopia has played a significant role. Amhara identity is in many ways shaped by conflict, migration, integration and political participation of the Oromo as well as other ethnic groups. However, this Oromo contribution has not always been recognised by scholars. For instance, some scholars claim that they did not contribute much to the civilisation of Ethiopia and they never possessed an advanced social and political structure. On the other hand Mohamed Hassan correctly asserts that 'no people have had their history so distorted or ignored and their achievements and human qualities undervalued as the Oromo have in the Ethiopian historiography' (Hassan 1990, p. 2).

Diaspora, homeland memory, and quest for identity

The Ethiopian diaspora plays an active role in Ethiopian nationalism. In order to examine this ambiguous identity I undertook a short survey by interviewing

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

London-based Ethiopian immigrants by means of structured identity questionnaires. Long-distance nationalists are not only active participants in the homeland politics but their identity is shaped in relation to the past which traces their history in relation to global political changes. Both the opposition and the ruling parties send their representatives to their supporters in North America and Europe. They lobby for their political and economic support. The diaspora communities have become influential in that during the 1995 election, Beyene Petros, leader of the southern coalition, entertained the idea of engaging with the EPRDF regime and contesting the elections. The diaspora was sharply critical and threatened to label Beyene a traitor to the cause. Unable to ignore this pressure, the southern coalition ultimately boycotted the elections.⁶

Apart from the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) supporters, few Ethiopians in the diaspora were active in political participation during the Derg rule. However, once Mengistu's fall was imminent the production of memory and identity among the exiled Ethiopians became a rallying point. Diaspora Ethiopians debated the future of their country and by implication their own national identity. Public gatherings, meetings, discussions and fierce debate took place in diaspora communities across the world. After the EPRDF seized power in 1991, Ethiopian nationalism awakened to activism. The Oromos also mobilised in opposition to the TPLF/EPRDF, which they described as a continuation of Amhara–Tigrayan hegemony.

In the diaspora Amharas were sometimes confusingly (and at other times conveniently) labelled with the history of the empire. This symbol provided unity and a sense of pride among certain members of the Amhara/Ethiopian community. Whereas for Oromos, especially Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) supporters in the diaspora, this history is interpreted as nothing more than Amhara chauvinism. Scholars from this group claim that much of Ethiopian historiography (particularly the historical migration and expansion of Oromo-speaking groups) has been imagined as the culmination of a series of barbaric invasions. The assertion is that these invasions were by ancient Cushitic and Muslim or 'pagan' people who were Semitic-speaking (Christian or Judeo-Christian) and formed a monarchical and literate civilisation in the heart of darkness.

Some Oromos in the diaspora have asserted that they have been excluded from the Ethiopian polity as they refused to become 'Amharised'. By articulating such narratives, Oromos establish a national identity with a distinctive shared memory and history. These shared identities are common language, Gadda tradition and the democratic value it enshrines as it is the foundation of Oromo civilisation, culture, identity and worldview. However, some Ethiopian nationalists refuse to accept the existence of a separate Oromo nation and promote an image of ethnic harmony.

Ethiopians in the United Kingdom

This survey is focused on the question of identity among the diaspora community in London by analysing what the term 'Amhara' means to an exiled Ethiopian individual. In the survey I interviewed 55 Ethiopian immigrants in the diaspora and selected 8 of these participants whose responses I analysed. Three of the eight are involved as political organisers for opposition groups in London. Some of the questions asked included:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

- Do Amhara exist as a distinct ethnic group?
- Who is Amhara?
- How do you identify yourself?
- Why is Amhara identity described through Ethiopian nationalism?
- Is identity important to you?

As part of the field research project I produced and presented the London-based Ethiopian millennium celebration programme for a community television network, BEN TV,⁷ and for the BBC World Service radio programme, Network Africa.⁸ I had the opportunity to interview several people based on the structured identity questionnaire as well as random discussion on issues of identity and nationality.

The number of Ethiopians who have emigrated has grown tremendously in the past three decades. The migrants left their homelands with the first wave of royalists who fled the Marxist military government, the Derg, in the early 1970s, followed by leftist opponents of the Derg who fled the period of Red Terror in the mid- to late 1970s.⁹

As this survey focuses on the Ethiopian diaspora in United Kingdom, it is important to sketch the background. There are about 20,000 Ethiopians living in the United Kingdom with roughly 84% of these based in London. Those who fled the Red Terror in the 1970s are the most active political participants. Most of these people see themselves as Ethiopians regardless of their particular ethnic identity. They define themselves as a conflict-generated diaspora group and always relate themselves to a specific, symbolically important and territorially defined homeland.

The second group of Ethiopian immigrants in the United Kingdom is the younger generation. They fled the country in protest against conscription in the mid- to late 1980s. This group includes Eritreans who left their war-torn land. Until 1993, Eritreans were asylum-seekers and refugees as Ethiopians, as Eritrea was not yet independent. One of the reasons for the Ethiopian diaspora that needs to be analysed is the way that identity relates to territorial attachment and the powerful symbols of homeland. In other words, a territorially defined concept of identity is key to Ethiopians in diaspora. For them Ethiopia still includes Eritrea and stresses a romanticised set of royal attributes, myths and symbols.

A large section of this group in diaspora is hostile to the incumbent regime in Addis Ababa. The mass demonstration against election results in 2005 is an illustration. Until now these groups have been actively involved in homeland politics. The recent debacle within the support groups of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) in North America and Western Europe is another example of the shortcomings of diaspora politics. As one of my participants (identified only as Mr X) argues:

CUD is not Amhara, I am not an Amhara myself for that matter but it is the only organisation that can save our country from division. I can't see myself without being identified as an Ethiopian. I lived 22 years in this country yet I haven't been naturalised. I am Ethiopian and will die Ethiopian. That is what I always teach to my children. (Mr X)

The role of the diaspora in homeland politics is limited, and some informants suggest they are participating in homeland politics by working as a support group, raising funds for the domestic struggle and lobbying the relevant government body to support their organisation policies and strategies. Those who fled during the 'Red Terror' continue their political struggle. Other, younger people have developed a strong commitment to their identity and homeland politics after meeting 'activists' from the Red Terror era. Ermias Belay, one of the interviewees, describes this:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Some of these people didn't have this ethnic identity until they came to England. When they discovered political movements in the Diaspora all of a sudden identity became an issue to them. They began to choose their own group to hang around with. I know some friends whom we know one another from back home; they became fanatic Oromos and stopped their friendships with Amharas or Ethiopians. They even stopped going to Ethiopian restaurants and boycotted any Ethiopian events including national celebrations. As for me I don't care. I can go to any restaurant whether it is Oromo or Eritrean as long as I like the food. (Ermias Belay)

My respondents were from different age groups, status and political affiliations. Their responses also vary according to the ethnic group to which they belong. For instance regarding the ethnicity question, an anonymous former member of the All Amhara Political Organization (AAPO), whom I interviewed, suggests:

The Amhara tribe or ethnic group is the sole author of unity of Ethiopia. The unity of the country did not come through the benevolence of all other minor ethnicity groups. It is the result of two centuries struggle and battle which was predominantly seen or marked through the reign of Theodros, Menelik, and Haile Selassie. The Amharas have always been the dominant force in protecting the country from invaders. They sacrificed themselves in several religious and patriotic wars because they are the creators of the unity of the country. All Amharas know that their forefathers have paid a price for the unity of the country. It is in their blood. They don't want to let go. Whereas the other tribes are not passionate about it. On the contrary, they believe that the Amharas took their land and made them serve/work ... The Amhara tribe has always stood for the unity of the country and as a result feel more Ethiopian and nationalistic than the other ethnic group.

In sharp contrast, most Oromo in the diaspora reject this assertion of Amhara as the modernising saviour of the united Ethiopia. They regard the Ethiopian state as an empire in which the highlander Amhara dominated and conquered the peaceful people of the south. Hence they argue that the Oromo people have the right to self determination and an independent Oromia state. A respondent from the OLF office states:

The process of historical distortion is not new for colonized peoples. In this case as in other colonial situations, the ruling group (Abyssian/Amhara) is underestimating the cultural strength of the ruled groups (Oromo and others). Amharas have always emphasized their cultural superiority over the Oromos and others by pointing out the similarities between their own and European forms – in religion, art, written works, legal traditions, and so forth. This is not to denigrate Amhara culture, but to point out the weakness of that position and of their claims to superiority based on such criteria. Europeans also underestimated the national strength of those they colonized and paid dearly through periods of war and strong resistance. Oromos, however, have not accepted the view of their own society as static, ruined, or not belonging to the modern era, and have refused to become accomplices in colonialism by consenting to these views.

Identity and nationalism are significant topics for most of the interviewees. However, many emphasised that they are not involved in any kind of ethnic or national politics. Yet others (including a respondent called Tariku) were exasperated and disillusioned with nationalism and forcefully rejected political commitments:

These days everybody wants to be an advocate for Ethiopia. But I tell you what all of them want – power. I can't see any difference between EPRDF and the Derg. All are the same, everybody wants power. (Tariku)

Another of my young informants, E.D., narrates his memory as an eight-year-old when he arrived to UK in 1985 with his parents:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

After we came to England we lived in Berkshire where many white people live. I don't forget my first day in school. When I told my fellow students that I was from Ethiopia the first question I was asked was why I didn't have a bloated belly. Or how I had managed to come to England. The second day two girls brought me some chocolate and biscuits. I was really angry but I didn't blame them. They believe what they watch on the television. I am still confused about my identity. I know I can't fit in here in England. My parents are too political. During my teens I believed them for what they said about Ethiopian nationalism being Amhara and so on, but not any longer. Once I had travelled to Ethiopia a couple of years ago my attitude towards ethnicity changed. People just invent these things for their own personal interest. That country is very poor; people should work hard instead of talking about politics day in and out. We should all get together and help the people. (E.D.)

Those who have dual national origins face a serious identity crisis. Those of mixed Eritrean and Ethiopian parentage were completely disillusioned. Sirak Kahissay, who was deported to Eritrea during the two years of bloody war between the two countries, narrates his story:

I was born in Addis to an Eritrean father and Ethiopian mother. I had never questioned my identity until the security men came to our house in the middle of the night, put us all in a lorry and deported us. Now I call myself Eritrean. There are so many things that happened during that time; I do not want to get in to details. Politicians are only concerned about their own interests they don't care about the civilians. During the Derg I was on the run to escape the so-called national service. After 10 years I was again on the because I escaped from a military camp in Eritrea. I only started bringing my life back after I arrived in the UK. (Sirak Kahissay)

Conclusion

A feudal monarchy and a repressive dictator couldn't hold Ethiopia together. Now we are trying another way. If Ethiopia breaks apart, then it was not meant to be.¹⁰ (Prime Minister Meles Zenawi)

When the EPRDF government implemented its ethnic federalism policy in 1991, new boundaries were created. It has embarked on a new state-building experiment. By accommodating ethnicity in the politics the government reconstructs the state under the principle of decentralisation. The government further indicates that decentralisation in the country is not seen merely as a device for the satisfaction of ethnic political demands, but also as the path leading to democratisation, through the devolution of decision-making in a manner that enables more people to influence the political process.

However, this experiment is far from completed and its success far from assured. This depends on the practicality of the provisions of decentralisation. The argument is whether this greater access to power will bring better access to resources.

Whether Amhara exists as a distinctive ethnic group remains debatable. Ethnicity does not explain anything, it needs to be explained itself; and that can only be done contextually (Doornbos 1998, p.8). However, Ethiopia is a multi-national and multi-cultural country. If Ethiopians use the term 'us' to distinguish themselves as insiders from others, then they created an outsider called 'them'.¹¹ If such a principle does not exist, there is no ethnicity.

Amhara is one of those groups of people to whom the term 'us' can be applied in a more inclusive way than merely referring to Amhara. In fact, a good argument can be made that the forces of history have indicated that the term can be applied to a

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

significant part of the Ethiopian population as a whole. It is high time that the sting of the Ethiopian 'us' and 'them' dichotomy be removed. This may be peacefully achievable, but will need careful planning and statesmanship of the highest order.

'Who, then, is Amhara?' It is a question of identity, but in this article I have addressed the issue in relation to ethnicity/nationalism. I have argued that this nationalism is defined according to subscription to a certain type of ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness. We have to distinguish between ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness. Ethnically a person can be an Oromo, Tigray or Amhara, but may have no nationalist consciousness or may consciously reject the nationalist construction *per se*. In other words, a person who is an Amhara by birth may not subscribe to Amhara identity and the Amhara nationalist consciousness.

Amhara identity can be defined from the ethnic perspective at the level of consciousness. In recent times, the 'nationalism' of Amharas has been pan-Ethiopian nationalism. With the end of Amhara domination in 1991, this particular, Amhara version of pan-Ethiopian nationalism was undermined by official politicisation of ethnicity. The AAPO has attempted to construct Amhara nationalism but this failed when pan-Ethiopian nationalism reached its zenith with the emergence of the CUD in 2005.

The resurgence of pan-Ethiopian nationalism is related principally to a claim of supremacy. That supremacy was used to gain political power, but also inevitably led to restoration of the ethnic supremacy of the Amhara. It was not for any other reason that the CUD lacked backing in Somali region and Oromiya.

Ethiopian nationalism in the diaspora is more nostalgic. Only the hardcore among them have a clear view. And this is more conservative and rigid than that in Ethiopia. The diaspora 'nationalism' is so weak and archaic that it does not transcend the ethnic hatred towards the leaders of TPLF or towards Tigreans in general. The ordinary person supporting 'Amhara nationalism' differs from the nationalism of the leaders of the AAPO. Ethiopians above all want to see their country emerge out of poverty and dictatorship.

Notes

1. Although people from the Ethiopian highland areas think of themselves as Amharas, the Northern Shoans specifically call themselves Amhara. That is why the Oromo and Tigrayan discourse associate the Northern Shoans as oppressive-Amharas.
2. Ethiopian political discourse prefers the use of 'nation, nationalities and ethnicities' in relation to the different peoples of Ethiopia. I have largely followed this convention in this paper. In reference to the country of Ethiopia, I have mainly used the 'nation-state' except where this seemed linguistically clumsy.
3. EC: Ethiopian Calendar.
4. 'Galla' is a derogatory name for ethnic Oromo people. Since the 1974 revolution it has become a criminal offence to use this term in public.
5. 'Gadda' is a system that stands for the Oromo way of life as a whole. More specifically it can also refer to a period of eight years that a community has retained power (Legesse 1973).
6. Personal communication, 11 September 2007.
7. BEN TV is a community television under Sky TV. The weekly show for which I present the occasional programme is called Africa Matters.
8. Network Africa is BBC's African current affairs programme on short-wave or digital radio. I present freelance programmes in this series. Most relate to Ethiopian affairs.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

9. 'Red Terror' refers to a period of extreme violence between 1975 and 1979. Some suggest it was a genocide orchestrated by the former Ethiopian regime (Derg). Tens of thousands of students, intellectuals and professionals lost their lives.
10. Quoted in *Time Magazine* (4 November 1991, p. 47).
11. The first fact of ethnicity is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between 'us and them' (Eriksen 2002, p. 18).

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A new discourse on 'gender' in Ethiopia¹

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Ethiopia seems to be charting a unique discourse on women which is similar to many of the 'gender' discourses on the continent (Namibia, Jamaica, Cameroon, etc.) that are embedded in the state. The situation is one where the government does not feel compelled to follow global trends on gender discursive practices. Instead it defines its own contextual framework of operations. Although this might have brought positive results in some countries (such as Jamaica, Chile, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the Philippines), in the Ethiopian context it is increasingly reflecting autocratic tendencies and control, hostility against civil society actors, and aggressive forms of repression. Government instruments such as Women's Machinery, Women's Policy, a National Action Plan, constitutional measures and decentralization policies have been set up to provide the government with a basis for its distorted form of Lenin's 'woman question' rhetoric. The aim of such instruments, in the main, is to provide the government with a monopoly position on the agenda of women's emancipation in the country. The result is the absence of a comprehensive radical gender discourse; in its place there is a rigorous focus on a depoliticized national women's discourse. This has an extremely narrow outlook that is actively promoted as meeting the demands of women's emancipation, rights and freedom in the country.

Introduction

Women all over the world have become increasingly radical in the last century. They have become active in their pursuit of gender equality in their respective countries. The African continent is also catching up at a tremendous pace with many countries taking a stance on the position of women and theorizing their unique African feminist experiences. Unfortunately, Ethiopia is not yet among the movers. It seems to be lost in time. The major issue is not that it tries to isolate itself from neighbouring trends; the problem lies in the state's active prevention of involvement in these new initiatives. Ethiopia makes proud claim to a distinctive history, and uses this to segregate itself from the rest of Africa.

This pride in their past and relative seclusion obscures the reality of events in the country. Many fail to recognize that it leads to the emergence of tabooism in certain spheres, including gender relations. Historical pride is treated as a marker of distinct identity and culture. It is at the same time accepted as untouchable, unquestionable, and unalterable; in short, it is not open for discussion or verification. Such

perceptions can lead to abuse, exploitation and distortion of the essence of historical events. This is exactly what is happening to women's issues in Ethiopia. The taboo on gender relations caused a great deal of suffering and exploitation of women in historical times and this tendency still prevails today. Lack of analysis on the Derg-led 'woman question', sees a repetition of the same policies by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front/Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (EPRDF/TPLF) regime. The only difference appears to be the timeframe. During the Derg's regime little effort was expended to keep the entire nation's women hostage; currently, more sophisticated efforts have to be employed. And currently this is exactly what the EPRDF/TPLF regime is engaged in.

The objective of this paper is to reveal the diversion that the EPRDF/TPLF government is heading on the gender discourse and how this is being implemented. It sets out to illustrate how the government has stalled on major transformations of women's emancipation since the time of the Derg. In taking over control of the 'woman question' from the Derg, the EPRDF/TPLF has effectively manipulated the issue according to its own perceptions.

This paper will follow how the state-led 'women' discourse in Ethiopia is taking shape. It will identify the specific elements in government policy that aim to prevent women from removing the constraints under which they are placed. Government measures on the 'woman question' include the setting up of the Women's Affairs Office (WAO) and the legal instrument that justifies this office's repressive actions, namely the National Policy on Ethiopian Women. It also includes the promulgation of a somewhat liberal constitution as regards women's rights; the signing of numerous international conventions on behalf of women; and the various national measures undertaken to uplift women's status such as affirmative action, policy reviews, etc. However, this is not all. The state-implemented decentralization policies will also be carefully scrutinized to show how not only urban women, but also those in rural areas throughout the country are kept within check. And finally, the chains that are being placed on the neck of civil society organizations and NGOs will reveal just how far the ruling party has gone and how far it is still willing to go in order to achieve its goals.

The rhetoric of a state-defined 'woman question': a deliberate distortion?

EPRDF/TPLF's history dates back to the students' revolt in the 1970s. During that time, students' consciousness was increasing by leaps and bounds and many of the students' unions in and outside the country had begun to set up women's study groups. The outcome was that the EPRDF/TPLF, as an opposition group against the Derg regime, also had an organized women's section among its cadres, similar to the other resistant groups.

However, a close review of the TPLF's early manifesto, issued in 1976, shows a complete ignorance about the rights of women and the problems they face (TPLF Manifesto 1976). This manifesto became one of the most powerful documents of the TPLF's political tenure. It was translated into numerous related policies and laws that came into existence after the EPRDF/TPLF took power.

The manifesto basically follows a Marxist-Leninist path – and mentions the word 'women' only twice in the entire document. The party held similar views to those of its predecessor regarding the revolution and the subsequent emancipation of women within this framework. It saw women's emancipation only in terms of their

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

active participation in the revolution and actively de-linked the social aspects of gender by treating the ‘woman question’ as a product of class within Ethiopian society. And, just like the Derg, it assumed itself to be the supreme authority on dealing with women’s issues – resulting in a distortion of women’s emancipation.

This view on women’s emancipation is the main reason why women were actively recruited as combatants and commanders by the EPRDF/TPLF to take part in the struggle against the Derg regime. At the time, the TPLF had also endorsed the formation of a separate women’s organization in Tigray, the Women Fighters Association of Tigray (WFAT) (Gudina 2003, p. 111), as long as the revolutionary goals remained clear. Ironically, this expectation still rules the party agenda at present. The emancipation of women outside this party-induced goal has never been (and is still not) considered an important issue.

And it was not only the Derg or the current ruling party who shared similar belief patterns on women’s emancipation in the country. According to Sara Vaughan and Tjetil Tronvoll (2003, p. 140), this ‘view continues to color the perspectives of the majority of Ethiopia’s political class, with a predominantly Marxist background, either EPRDF or opposition’. During the 2005 election, the opposition parties also displayed gross misperceptions regarding women’s emancipation. Many did not even advance women candidates to stand for elections and others were totally ignorant and ill-experienced to voice the concerns of women. The general belief that still prevails is one where women are expected to support men in their endeavours and not venture to take any purposeful initiatives on their own.

After the TPLF/EPRDF assumed political power in 1991 the government’s formula on the ‘woman question’ became further refined. With the rhetoric of Lenin on the ‘woman question’ being used as a cover-up, the actual EPRDF’s/TPLF’s ‘woman question’ began to take a different shape.

The government maintains a vanguard position upholding the myth that women are becoming emancipated if they actively participate in education and employment in state-directed development programmes and other state-ordered endeavours. This is tantamount to a new form of slavery,² with policies even more repressive than those in place during the Derg regime. Such measures succeed in keeping women chained, restrained and muted. This particular notion of controlling women runs like a thread through government policies and the programmes that impact upon women. Let us look at the evidence that leads one to conclude that a party-led ‘national women’s discourse’ is evolving in Ethiopia.

National Machinery for the Advancement of Women (NWM)

Setting-up of instruments of control and repression

With the re-arrangement of the ‘woman question’ under the TPLF/EPRDF regime, the state repression of women has become more rigid, dwarfing the Derg’s control mechanisms. The TPLF/EPRDF immediately began to emulate its new political and economic policies, curbing all (opposition) freedoms and interests in civil society. The ‘woman question’ did not remain immune from such interference. As usual, impressive initiatives expressed in persuasive terms emerged within the woman paradigm. These initiatives were designed not only to win over the populace, but also to dazzle the international community. Unfortunately they remained mere decorations on the wall.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

They did, however, serve one purpose. Careful examination of government action has begun to reveal the intention behind these measures.

It was obvious from the beginning of EPRDF/TPLF rule that civil society had no meaningful place in its framework and would never be considered an equal partner as far as collaboration was concerned. In fact, Ethiopian women were and still are treated as passive, ignorant recipients without an agenda of their own. The normal procedure from the EPRDF's/TPLF's perspective is a top-down process. All policies, plans, orders, and directions move from the top political cadres to the lower rungs of the ladder, finding their way from there down to society. There is no dialogue, no discussion, and no questioning. Blind obedience is expected of civil society.

In order to effectively impose its plans and policies on the female masses, a National Machinery for the Advancement of Women or Women's Affairs Office (WAO) was set up as early as 1992 by the EPRDF/TPLF regime in the country. This was seen as a welcome move by the international community because the United Nations had endorsed such actions as early as 1975.³ The WAO was thus set up in Ethiopia as a strategic instrument. It was mandated to coordinate, facilitate and monitor women's affairs at national level and to strive for the enactment of new policies and the improvement of existing ones in the area of women's concerns.

Since the WAO was authorized to encourage the establishment of women's affairs organs in all regions, including central ministries and public organizations at all levels, the country saw the proliferation of Women's Affairs Bureaus (WABs) in the various regions of Ethiopia in accordance with the process of decentralization. There were government administrative focal points such as in *kebelles* and *woredas*, as well as Women's Affairs Departments (WADs) at the various ministries. The overall objective of these was to institutionalize gender issues in government policies, programmes and structures and to facilitate the implementation of the newly-initiated National Policy on Ethiopian Women in 1993.

Problems facing the NWM

Hopes were high in the period from 1976 to 1985, the International Decade of Women, and it was sincerely believed that these NWM structures around the globe were the answer to all women's problems. After all, it was argued, NWM structures would be established specifically for women and run by women who would be politically empowered and *free* to pursue a radical agenda on the emancipation of women. However, by the end of the women's decade it was becoming increasingly clear that the objectives of these machineries could not be met. The UN carried out a number of evaluations on the operations of NWM in various countries only to conclude that these machineries faced numerous obstacles and problems (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p.8). Would that mean a call for a new approach or the demise of the NWMs? Neither happened because the Beijing Platform for Action stood actively behind these machineries. The successes in some countries (such as the Philippines and Chile) also encouraged a treatment of the problems instead of a new approach.

The situation in Ethiopia is not surprisingly among the most deplorable. The WAO faced so many problems that it simply became incomprehensible why nothing was done to amend them. Why did the ailing and crippled WAO and WABs continue

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

to exist? After the 2005 elections, the WAO was replaced by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA); however, all the WABs and WADs are still kept in place. Let us briefly look at the gravity of the problems they faced before 2005.

The first major problem facing the WAO was directly embedded in its manner of emergence, which is a key factor in determining credibility (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 11) and level of cooperation in a given society. The WAO was clearly a political instrument emerging from the central government. Thus, from the outset it was regarded with suspicion and evasion by civil society (a suspicion that can be traced back to the emergence of the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association [REWA] as the political arm of the Derg regime). This immediately crippled the WAO and restricted its aims. It not only became directly dependent and accountable to the government: worse still, it failed to become genuinely representative of Ethiopian women across the board.

The second problem might well have emerged from its placement or location within the whole political structure. Placement is crucial, because it determines freedom, independence, commitment and effectiveness of operation. In Ethiopia, the WAO was placed directly under the Prime Minister's Office. This should have been seen as the most strategic positioning because it implied being at the hub of the state, well-placed to provide the WAO with the much-needed influence and power to 'function as a "watchdog" and be instrumental in influencing the planning process across all development sectors' (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 13). Thus positioned, it could also exert stronger influence and links with other government organs and departments.

Theoretically, any other location would jeopardize the influence of the WAO. For example, if it had been placed under the umbrella of another ministry or executive organ of the state, the problems it might face could be huge – such as competing for scarce resources, co-option by the department, or being forced to change its agenda. In the current situation (after the 2005 elections), the WAO is organized as a separate ministry, MoWA. This independence may bring some level of autonomy, but comes with its own set of problems. For example, in its efforts to compete with the other ministries for the government's scarce resources and trying to keep the ministry competitive and floating, it may lose its effectiveness. It could also face a more serious problem: the inability to influence mainstream policies and plans of other ministerial departments (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 13). The threat of not being taken seriously by other departments can also add up to further ghettoization of women's issues and this tendency might slowly take the upper hand. This dangerous precedent is already taking its toll; according to some, even the prime minister maintains that women now have everything they ever wanted and should be in a position to handle their problems by themselves.

Analysis of the initial placement of the WAO under the Prime Minister's Office, regrettably, reveals that this placement did not lead to more acceptance or trust of women's potential and the level of suspicion remains unchanged. It also failed to contribute to any of the hoped-for positive outcomes mainly because the WAO does not perform a comprehensive role. Presently, the situation looks even worse, with the WAO's central position shifted to a marginal one. As a separate ministry, the already sparse initiatives on women will become ever more sporadic and scarce.

A third problem of the WAO involved its structuring, which exacerbated its already fragile image in society. With autocratic tendencies guiding the political culture in the country, the WAO followed this trend and was also hierarchically

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

structured. This means that WABs and WADs were positioned at a lower level taking orders from WAO. The specific mandate that was given to these WADs and WAB to monitor and 'cooperate' with NGOs in their respective fields, also tended to take on hierarchical overtones, with the government institution inevitably taking the lead, having the last word and the final decision-making power. Such a mandate was obstructive to civil society's dialogue and cooperation with government. What actually took place was a form of control with state supervision exercised over civil society women organizations. This caused tensions and rifts between both.

Another problem was the low capacity of appointed party loyalists in posts at all levels of the WAO, WABs and WADs. This directly undermined the emancipation efforts of women in the field. The initial staffing in the WAO was through the appointment of party cadres, where being a 'woman' and being a party member was often seen as sufficient qualification to head WAO desks. Level of education and qualifications in gender studies were not taken into consideration at all. This ineptness was supposedly to be remedied by on-the-job training. With such a low level of gender awareness, commitment to the genuine concerns of women's emancipation was totally missing and instead there was blind obedience to government's misguided policies.

A fifth problem concerned the understaffing of the WAO offices, a situation which placed additional constraints on their institutional capacity. Many of the offices were staffed by only one person who was directly appointed, and one 'expert'. The respective departments were expected to deal with the recruitment of their additional staff. Some regional branches were even found to lack a focal person. Others were at loggerheads with recruited staff who refused to become the government's puppets, claiming that they were given misguided instructions on gender and women's rights. Other staff members were reluctant to join government organs because of the undemocratic, authoritarian political culture and repression. Remuneration in these government posts was also particularly low and demands for increases were simply ignored. This led to a situation where many of the qualified people decided to leave.

A sixth problem that hampered the successful operation of the WAO was associated with budgeting. Most NWMs in other African countries were adjudged by the UN to be under-budgeted and this was also the case in Ethiopia. Government budgets remained limited and funds were often diverted to issues of national priority such as HIV/AIDS, poverty reduction, and so on. The WAO and respective WABs and WADs were often left with marginal budgets to manage their affairs. This low budgeting made them dependent on external donor funding which had its own implications and problems. For example, since most donors were more concerned with short-term, result-oriented activities, certain longer-term activities such as lobbying tended to be neglected (Moser 1993, p. 125, quoted in Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 14). Donor dependency also carried the risk that the WAO would not be able to exert any meaningful influence on government policies and plans. Low budgeting reflected the low esteem attached to the WAO – it was obviously seen as a symbolic surrogate to control women and keep civil society muted, stringently checked, monitored and controlled. The Derg had done this more overtly but currently the EPRDF is implementing similar tactics in a covert manner. In Ethiopia, the WAO has become heavily dependent on donor funding, receiving funds from external donors such as the World Bank (WB), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The seventh problem facing the WAO, and debatably one of the most crucial, was its focus. After its formation it embarked on a welfarist approach (immediate basic needs relief and service delivery) based on the 'woman question'. This approach addressed women's issues in isolation from the rest of society (men) and was quite popular in the 1960s. After the 1980s some NWMs in other countries shifted to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach albeit, given the situation of each country, many had merely made a rhetorical shift and continue to practise Women in Development (WID) (Uganda, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Philippines, etc.) (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 11). This can be attributed to various factors which generally boiled down to the kind of funds available (most donors and governments are not keen on GAD due to its radical stance on structural issues), capacity (NWM are often staffed by poorly qualified staff who lack the capacity to move beyond the WID understanding), the unique situation of women in each country (where many are not ready yet to jump the WID-ship), or simply because of the radicalism embedded in GAD that makes it undesired for fear of a backlash.

The major problem in Ethiopia is that the stringent focus on the WID approach has led to the increased ghettoization and marginalization of women's issues which continue to haunt the current moves on gender issues. The radical agenda of GAD is often hampered by persistent use of the neutral WID approaches in GAD. Even gender mainstreaming tends to be absorbed within the WID approach (reformist) while in fact its prerequisites are more transformative and agenda-setting oriented, where radical reforms are needed in gender relations involving both women and men (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 9). The situation is further aggravated by the emergence of WAO as a government instrument that pushes for this welfarist approach. This is causing further resistance in civil society.

An eighth problem inherent within the structure of WAO was the lack of a feminist base. Many employees in this machinery simply lacked the level of critical consciousness and radicalism due to being mere political appointees with low academic qualifications. Quick-fix training courses were sponsored by the government in an attempt to remedy this situation and were treated as a form of capacity-building. However, such moves carried serious consequences in terms of loyalty and accountability. Their accountability was to the ruling party, instead of the women whom they were supposed to represent (Setegn 2003, p. 12). They not only grossly failed to commit themselves to the WID/GAD agenda but they would never dare to take up a radical stance on GAD simply because they could not challenge the government. For example, they 'cannot be seen to align themselves with protest movements against another arm of the state' (Setegn 2003, p. 27). This made their advocacy role highly questionable.

Some additional problems facing the WAO have been enumerated by a number of scholars. These include the lack of autonomy of the WAO; lack of accountability; low level of collaboration between WAO structures and civil society organizations; lack of commitment; lack of women's organizations, etc. (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 105–106, Birke *et al.* 2002, p. 76, Hussian *et al.* 1997, p. 27).

In sum, it is clear that the WAO was subordinate to government structures and lacked the mandate to define its own power and roles. It was totally deficient on serious commitment and objectivity. For example, the WAO worked extensively on gender mainstreaming guidelines in various sectors. But the lack of commitment to their implementation saw many of those guidelines shelved and they soon

disappeared from sight. And where 'gender' was actually mainstreamed in sectors, plans and policies, no concrete outcomes were visible. Guidelines were often left to the gender offices set up by the state in the various ministries or regional governments for implementation.

Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)

Since the federal elections in 2005, the WAO has been removed and replaced as an independent ministry, MoWA.⁴ This move has led to contradictory feelings among women in the country. On the one hand it created some discomfort among the WABs and WADs in terms of operational agreements and mandates. On the other hand, many women had hoped for a long time that a separate ministry would be set up and would assume better representation.

The general trend emerging at present is that MoWA is taking over all activities on women as its legitimate mandate. This includes activities that are implemented by the various ministries' Women's Affairs Departments. An anonymous interviewee informed me that staff members feel redundant as their work is being scraped from under their feet. As a new ministry, perhaps MoWA is becoming over-zealous and is assuming a monopoly on women's issues. Only time will tell of its failures and/or achievements. What has to be kept in mind however is that, as a ministry, MoWA is still an instrument of the ruling party and accountable to the party. This means that nothing may change in the way operations are carried out. The WAO of the past and the current MoWA are identical in many ways and MoWA will in all likelihood continue to be beset by the numerous problems (outlined above) that WAO faced.

Since the emergence of MoWA, another rather ironic trend has appeared. The prime minister, under whose office the WAO falls, no longer feels obliged to cater for special support to this ministry. In some ways, this might be justified. As one of 20 ministries, MoWA needs to be treated on an equal footing and has to compete for the scarce resources and attention of the government. But on the other hand, being a separate ministry does not mean having any form of independence or being freed from all its constraints. Currently the greater risk for MoWA is that it might well be demoted and not taken seriously by other departments. This could also speed up the ghettoization of women's issues.

One serious concern is why the government persists in using 'women' in its vocabulary. After the Women's Affairs Office was dismantled, and after 15 years of experience of working on 'women issues', why does it not shift to 'gender'? Why is there no ministry of 'Gender Affairs' instead of 'Women's Affairs'? Regrettably, women working in the various WABs and WADs are clearly directed to mind their language to conform with government dictates. They are not allowed to use the word 'gender' and have been instructed to continue using the word 'women'.

The National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW)

The formulation of the ideological base

In order to provide a guideline of operations for the WAO and its extensive arms, and provide direction to the EPRDF/TPLF agenda on the 'woman question', a National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW) was issued in September 1993. The 'official' aim

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

of this policy was to assist women in the attainment of gender equality throughout the country. In fact, the NPEW is a very limited document but is expressed in very ambitious and lofty language. For example, it is treated as the mantra for poverty reduction. According to the Development Planning and Research Department and Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, it 'is intended to provide an implementation instrument to mainstream gender into policies and programs for more gender equitable poverty reduction outcomes' (DPRD and MoFED 2005, p. 18). The WAO and World Bank (1998, p.1) defines its overall aim as being: to 'institutionalize the political, economic, and social rights of women by creating appropriate structures in government offices and institutions so that the public policies and interventions are gender-sensitive and can ensure equitable development for all Ethiopians'. The three main objectives of the NPEW are promulgated as:

- Facilitating conditions conducive to the speeding-up of equality between men and women so that women can participate in the political, social and economic life of their country on equal terms with men and ensuring that their right to own property, as well as their other human rights are respected and that they are not excluded from the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour or from performing public functions and being decision-makers;
- Facilitating the necessary condition whereby rural women can have access to basic social services and to ways and means of lightening their work-load; and
- Eliminating, step by step, prejudices as well as customary and other practices that are based on the idea of male supremacy and enabling women to hold public office and to participate in the decision-making process at all levels. (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1993, pp. 25–26).

This policy document further outlines the numerous strategies for its implementation and the duties and responsibilities of the Women's Affairs Office (WAO) and Women's Affairs Bureaus (WABs) (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1993, p. 29–33). At present the MoWA is in charge of its implementation. This NPEW is not only a product of the ruling party, commanded by its cadres, it is also meant to be imposed on society at large. As such, it is clear on the role of civil society, requiring that NGOs and donor agencies to do their share to help in its effective implementation (NAP-GE 2006).

Review of the NPEW

Like many of its policies, the NPEW also shows many deficiencies. Because it emerged during the early days of EPRDF/TPLF rule, it is clearly devoid of civil society input. In fact, like all policies at the time, it was prepared by the political cadres of the TPLF/EPRDF. A close scrutiny of its content proves that it has a biased approach to the 'woman question'. This bias has a strong WID-welfarist emphasis, focusing narrowly on relief and service delivery. It also reveals a clear top-down system of operation lending great autonomy and power to its implementing agency, the WAO (now the MoWA), and sees rural target groups as passive recipients.

Given the many years of existence of this NPEW (15 years at present), what has been achieved and what are its shortfalls? To identify the factors impacting on effective implementation of this policy, the World Bank, together with the WAO, carried out a study in 1998. Many problems were identified but, regrettably, nothing

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

has been done on key issues such as the development of women's critical consciousness, independence, general empowerment and political empowerment in specific, gender justice, and structural reforms to ensure sustainable gains on women's rights, and so forth.

The very first problem identified by the WB/WAO review of the NPEW was the new ethnic federal system of governance itself which was seen as a serious obstacle to the effective implementation of the policy (see further elaboration on this under decentralization below). Transferring the responsibilities for the implementation of policy to regional governments was cited as causing a major delay in its implementation. Regional governments were found to be lacking in the necessary capacity to ensure effective implementation of the policy. But that is not all. According to the WB/WAO assessment it was revealed that the regional Women's Affairs Bureaus are equally ill-equipped to manage the policy.

A second problem was linked to the top-down approach and hierarchical structuring of the NPEW. This structuring failed to take into account the real concerns of women at grassroots level; were not demand-driven; and were found to be lacking in transparency or accountability to the people. The study inferred that the NPEW actually pushed women further away, making them suspicious of taking part in any government-initiated policies and programmes (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, pp. 104–105). Such levels of hostility created a huge rift between the WAO and civil society, rendering cooperation minimal if not completely lacking.

Additional problems identified by the World Bank/WAO evaluation were the prevalence of cultural practices that denied women their inherent right to land; the denial of justice and the right to a fair trial; and the lack of grassroots women's organizations (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 105).

Since this was a major investigation of the NPEW, undertaken by two prestigious bodies, its findings are extremely valuable. According to Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll (2003, p. 106) the assessment revealed that 'the government's policies on women have failed to deliver substantial and radical progress towards change'. In fact, the overall policy is a gross failure and does not address the plight of women at all. This is clearly evident in that women are still 'a heavily disadvantaged group in terms of social, cultural and structural discrimination' and proof of this can be found in 'numerous sectors of society ranging from education to health, violence against women and legal regression and so forth' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 106). Unfortunately the government has shown no inclination at all to overhaul this policy and draft a new one, and the aging document drawn up in 1993 is still used as the official mantra on the government-directed 'woman question'. Furthermore there is not the slightest intention of the state taking note of the problems that have been identified or trying to remedy them.

In sum, there are not only serious shortcomings in the NPEW, but many of the problems arose because of the guardians and implementers of this policy, namely the WAO. They simply lacked the desire, capacity, human power, finance and technical resources to pursue the policy as planned. Almost 13 years after its introduction, a strategic plan has finally emerged to implement the policy.

Probably one of the most serious elements of concern is the level of hypocrisy displayed by the EPRDF/TPLF when it comes to resource and budget allocation to the various ministerial departments, including the WAO and probably the current new MoWA. It fails to acknowledge that machineries by themselves do not translate

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

rhetoric into practice. The weak professional capacity of the WAO, combined with the many problems they faced, gave a clear indication that something was amiss. Now MoWA is placed in charge of the implementation of this policy. But, considering its set-up, there is a degree of pessimism on whether the problems will be remedied or simply ignored.

National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE)

Ironically, the actual translation of the National Women's Policy into action did not take place until 2000, a full seven years after the NPEW came into existence. It was instituted with the assistance of the Donor Group for the Advancement of Women (GAW) in the country. After the rejection of the first draft, a new consultancy team was assembled to re-formulate the plan. It finally saw the light of the day in 2006, 13 years after the NPEW had emerged. A five-year action plan is to be used as a tool for gender-equitable development (NAP-GE 2006). The NAP-GE has a strong focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the country's Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), making sure that gender considerations are incorporated. This NAP-GE is expected to be funded through the federal ministries, local governments, gender donor groups, international NGOs and others.

In the NAP-GE, the MoWA selected its own priority areas of intervention as per the government's directives. Among the 12 areas selected in the Beijing Platform for Action, the NGOs and donor agencies together with the MoWA identified seven critical areas as national priorities addressing women's needs in Ethiopia. These are:

- Poverty reduction and economic empowerment of women and girls;
- Education and training of women and girls;
- Reproductive rights, health and HIV/AIDS;
- Human rights and violence against women and girls;
- Empowering women in decision-making;
- Women and the environment; and
- Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. (NAP-GE 2006)

The overall goal of this plan is to contribute towards the attainment of equality between women and men, in social, political and economic development. Specific objectives are laid in the areas of enhanced economic growth, improved human development, democratization and governance, and improved public institutional performance (NAP-GE 2006). The MoWA's selection of these seven critical areas of intervention is being incorporated in its action plan of operations. Those involved in working on gender issues in the country are directed to abide by these guidelines, including civil society, NGOs, the donor community and others.

The WAO (and now MoWA) is seen as having a monopoly on the representation of the country's women abroad at regional and international conferences and meetings. On these occasions many of them will be found patting each other on the back and claiming to have done a great deal while NGOs prove otherwise. For example, during the various workgroup sessions on thematic areas of the Platform for Action during the sixth regional Conference on Women in 1999 'government delegations were more concerned about putting on record what their various governments had done than in assessing the relevance of such interventions in promoting gender equality' (Mensah-Kutin 2000, p.6). The same criticism can be

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

made of Ethiopian delegates. However, the WAO admitted in its national progress report in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing +10) that there is a low level of leadership of women in politics (Prime Minister's Office/Women's Affairs Sub-Sector 2004, p. 25) and affirmed the absence of a national action plan at the time. It also admitted that there is a serious lack of awareness on the Beijing Platform for Action, and shortfalls in both finance and qualified staff (Prime Minister's Office/Women's Affairs Sub-Sector 2004, p. 34).

Regrettably, these acknowledgements never seem to imply that action will be taken to remedy the problems identified. The acknowledgement is meant to satisfy the international community. It becomes a vicious circle – admitting the problems, but lacking the mandate, capacity and resources to overhaul them. They continue to blame others and gather pity for themselves.

The constitution, international treaties and affirmative measures as state instruments of control

Being a step ahead, taking control of the legal environment

The Federal Constitution of Ethiopia was promulgated in 1995. According to Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003, p. 53), it is an excellent document enshrining democratic standards and respect for human rights. Of its 106 articles, 31 are devoted to human and democratic rights, providing a detailed and comprehensive list of fundamental rights and freedoms that are assigned to individuals and groups. Its chapters on human and democratic rights are comprehensive and according to article 13(2) 'shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and International instruments adopted by Ethiopia' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 53).

This constitution can also be said to have renewed the commitment to the gender policy and clearly expresses legislative support for women through its various articles. For example, article 25 prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender. Article 35 is the most comprehensive law regarding women's rights and consists of nine sub-provisions.⁵ These are stipulations on the equal enjoyment of rights; equality of rights in marriage; entitlement to affirmative measures; freedom from harmful traditional practices; maternity leave; equal participation in programme planning and implementation; equal rights on property ownership; equality in employment; and full access to reproductive health care. A number of other constitutional provisions, namely those embodied in articles 7, 33, 38, 42 and 89 also have a direct bearing on the protection of the rights of Ethiopian women.⁶

Beside local efforts, the government in Ethiopia has always been among the first to become a signatory to the many international conventions on the rights of women which include:

- The Convention on Discrimination of Employment and Occupation (ratified in 1966);
- The Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1969);
- The Convention for the Suppression of the Trafficking of Persons and of the Exploitation and Prostitution of Others (1981);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1981);

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991);
- The Convention on the Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (ratified in 1969). (Tewolde 1999, p. 7, Ahmed *et al.* 2001, p. 7)

Ethiopia is also known to have signed other international conventions that have direct bearing on the rights of women. Some of these are still awaiting ratification such as the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Equal Value. Furthermore the Convention on Maternity Protection and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have both been adopted but neither has been signed nor ratified. In similar manner the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted but has not yet been signed or ratified (Ahmed *et al.* 2001, p. 7).

Ethiopia is also a signatory to many of the regional and continental conventions such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which includes provisions that protect women. But since women's rights in general were largely excluded from this charter, a draft protocol containing specific articles regarding African Women's Rights was added in September 2000 (Biseswar 2004, p. 12) and ratified in July 2003 in Maputo, South Africa. Among the 15 countries who had ratified this protocol by the end of 2005 are Togo, Cape Verde, The Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Lesotho, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Benin. Ethiopia has not yet done so.

The issue with these conventions is how to make them form part of Ethiopian legislation. To accommodate this, the government has incorporated article 9 (4) in the 1995 constitution stipulating 'that all international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land'.⁷

Many other steps undertaken by the TPLF/EPRDF government on women's rights include revision of the Family Law in 2000; revision of the Penal Code; revision of the Labour Law; launching of a Social Welfare Policy in 1997; an Educational Policy; the formulation of a National Health Policy in 1993; the promulgation of a National Population Policy; an HIV/AIDS policy, and many more (Tewolde 1999, pp. 5–7).

The government has introduced further affirmative measures⁸ for the equal representation of women in employment, education and political leadership. Among these the education sector can be cited as the only one to take affirmative action seriously. In the other areas (employment and politics), the implementation of affirmative action is facing serious setbacks (Ashenafi 2003, p. 31). Ironically, the resistance against affirmative measures is mounting, specifically coming from ruling party women cadres, including the WAO. They challenge it on its democratic nature and how beneficiaries would simply lack representation and the capacity to deliver (Ashenafi 2003, p. 31, Asfaw 2006, p. 139).

A critical overview of legislation on women's rights

The legal reforms that have been put in place are not without shortcomings (see for example the discussion section of Mulugeta's paper 2004, p. 50). From the onset, the constitution has been drawn up in such a manner that even legal experts will find it difficult to admit that it contains loopholes towards conservative ends and

centralized control – but it certainly does. For example, the very constitution that grants women equal rights also includes laws that infringe upon these rights. This is because there is a simultaneous recognition of cultural/customary laws⁹ in accordance with the TPLF/EPRDF's decentralization policies (Tegegn 2004, p. 17). Article 34 (5) of the constitution stipulates:

This Constitution shall not preclude the adjudication of disputes relating to personal and family laws in accordance with religious or customary laws, with the consent of the parties to the disputes.¹⁰

Such inclusion of regional autonomy in the constitution gives due recognition to the rights of customary and religious laws to define, regulate and adjudicate on personal relations in terms of marriage, divorce, property ownership, child custody, inheritance and adoption: in short, the exact domains of women's culturally-defined existence. Gita Gopal and Maryam Salim have presented a paper on 'Gender and Law' in East Africa studying the impact of the law on women. They found that the Civil Code in Ethiopia has had little or no relevance in the last 38 years for the majority of Ethiopian women in rural areas where ethnic groups continue to apply customary and religious laws (Gopal and Salim 1998, p. 9). These applications are seldom fair and just to women who lack the level of legal literacy to access the constitution. Decentralization should have looked into this and provided room for better legal representation of women. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Gopal and Salim question the motives for the retention of customary laws in the constitution and find it rather puzzling why the EPRDF government has done so (Gopal and Salim 1998, p. 143). Ironically, while the same constitution affirms the subordination of such laws when people's rights are negatively affected,¹¹ 'within the rural context customary practices have greater influence on gender relations than the formal system' (World Bank 2005, p. 44).

A second problem with the laws is their implementation. They are often found to be 'weakly enforced and in many cases provide contradictory or incomplete coverage in their protection for women. ... Existing laws are often applied by judges in a manner that does not take account of women's rights' (World Bank 2005, p. 44). Implementation is also cited as one of the major hurdles preventing gender justice. There are many cases where a victim's rights have been sacrificed and where they become *personae non gratae*.¹² Injustice is often meted out by law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and judges. Presiding judges have frequently been found to give differential treatment to persons who have committed similar crimes. These cases show that women's rights are sometimes compromised when the laws are implemented in a biased form.

A third problem with the laws is linked to the implementation of international conventions that have been ratified by the Ethiopian government. Although they are supposed to be treated as the laws of the land, the reality is that often this is not the case. Until a law is published in the country's *Negarit Gazetta* (the Government Gazette) it cannot be considered as the law of the land. The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has never been released as such. Then too, many judges are not even aware of CEDAW or how to apply it. So, although CEDAW states that governments who have become members of the CEDAW cannot use religion or culture as an excuse to make women enjoy less rights than they should or infringe upon the rights of women (see the discussion section of the paper presented by Mulugeta 2004, p. 53), the reality is that

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

this indeed happens in Ethiopia, where culture and tradition are upheld as almost divine by some of the highest judges in the country.

A fourth problem concerns legal literacy and sensitization of women to gain information on their rights if they are to gain from these amended laws. Unfortunately, there is no commitment on the part of the government to promote or provide legal literacy to the population or the law enforcement bodies (Ashenafi 2000, p. 7). The few NGOs operating in the field find themselves harassed and intimidated; they are discouraged from proceeding. Nor does lobbying result in the government taking any meaningful action or heeding societal concerns (Ashenafi 2000, p. 10) causing a wider rift between state and civic organizations.

Despite significant changes in their *de jure* rights, women thus remain disempowered and marginalized (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 46). The repression of women and the way the government simply ignores this is often justified in the same manner that the Derg employed to justify its repressive mechanisms. The EPRDF/TPLF tirelessly tries to find excuses for its shortcomings, inaction, inefficiency, and undemocratic rule. It is not uncommon to hear the regions being blamed for not implementing government policies and laws and the use of traditions and cultural rigidity for resisting change; or, indeed, the need for more time to transform the country's political culture and society.

The myth on decentralization and women's emancipation

As mentioned above, there are other aspects of negligence by the government as far as women's rights are concerned. A very explicit example is its decentralization policy. In a democratic society decentralization should be seen as offering more hope and material gain to women. It carries the notion of bringing the state closer to people and people closer to the state. This practice can translate into giving women more space for their voices to be heard and to provide a greater degree of political representation. Given the mandate of regional governments, their focus is on consumer services and the implementation of policy. Within this, they directly touch on the lives of women and can play a crucial role in addressing women's immediate needs (Hirschmann 1991, quoted in Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 29). In such societies, women also appear to have more influence on local government policies and laws, especially those directly affecting their lives. It offers them space and opportunities to play an active role in politics and hold the local authorities accountable through greater transparency (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 28).

On the other hand, decentralization can mean further losses for women, especially in autocratic societies that are run by one-party states, such as is the case in Ethiopia. For example, the agenda of women's emancipation, the NPEW, becomes a peon of delegation, as has been shown above. This means that while the state is unwilling to take action in the central organs of power, it delegates regional states to take up the matter, fully aware that the regional governments are not equipped to do so. It is a form of 'passing the buck' about issues on which there is little or no commitment (Kardam 1995, quoted in Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 29). By delegating the implementation of the particular policy to the regional governments, the federal government absolves itself of all blame for its inaction. It may even openly accuse the regions' customary laws and practices for violating federal legislation and policies, thereby jeopardizing the effective implementation of the NPEW.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The implementation of the NPEW is thus delegated to the WABs, who are situated in regional offices. But these structures are totally ineffective, lacking human resources, capacity, independence, a clear mandate, a budget and the power to implement anything on their own unless directed from above. This means that the women's agenda is denigrated even further.

The traditional setting of most of the regional governments, where many continue to be ruled through customary and religious law, adds further to this misery. One could but question such actions by the government. Delegating the NPEW to the regional governments is obviously meant to remove it from being implemented. It is what S. Longwe calls the disappearance of the policy in the 'patriarchal cooking pot'¹³ (Longwe 1999, p.69). In situations of intensive competition for scarce resources, gender concerns are thus deliberately sent to their grave. Meanwhile, the tokenistic manner of the setting-up of the WAO and establishing a supposedly liberating NPEW are literally left to gain acceptance on their own or function as symbol for the government's pride.

Besides 'passing the buck' and 'policy evaporation', there are additional problems for women in traditional regional settings. Many regional governments display a large measure of conservatism and resistance against change, especially when it comes to women's rights. In fact, the few gains women might have made during the Derg era appeared to have been rolled back during the EPRDF regime. With the ethnic/linguistic decentralization policy being avidly pursued by the government, the country's regions have been divided along major ethnic lines. Ethnic diversity is often embedded in cultural diversity which finds expression through various practices, many of which fall into the domain of women. Ethnic federalism can thus be read as a revival and strengthening of ethnic consciousness and cultural/traditional practices; often these include those that are harmful to women's advancement and hamper their emancipation. For example, 'the upsurge of ethnic consciousness in some parts of the country may have revived a number of traditional practices (often seen as ethnic boundary markers), which further disadvantage women' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p.21). This includes the practices of early marriage, abduction and female genital mutilation (Berhane-Selassie 1998, p.31 quoted in Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p.48). Decentralization under such circumstances may actually lead to the strengthening of paternalistic and androarchal attitudes towards women. It could be seen as deliberate efforts to disempower them.

Within the decentralization process, the role of religious revival should not be ignored. Religious revival implies a re-emergence or reinforcement of the traditional gender ideology due to a lack of strong challenges from women. Among the many religions that are practised in Ethiopia (Orthodox Christianity; Islam; Pentecostal faith; Judaism; Catholicism) women are invariably found to be the major adherents. If the NPEW in particular is felt to be a threat to the preservation of such cultural and religious belief systems, it will be automatically shelved or selectively implemented in order not to disrupt the traditional settings of the regions. This means that the policy is implemented on a limited basis. This practice is condoned by the government because of the constitutional guarantees of cultural and religious preservation; and in turn this leads critics to question the motives of the government.

Although a few women have indeed taken seats in the legislative and administrative organs of the regional states, most of these regions are found to be

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

more conservative than the cities. In these regions, androarchal perceptions on the role of women lead the discourse on women's emancipation and rights, and people in these regions may find it difficult to accept that there are roles for women other than those within their demarcated domestic gender domains. Without adequate training and sensitization, imposing the NPEW on the regions through the decentralization process is bound to fail. The few women entering such political arenas find themselves in the lion's lair. They become submerged in political pressure to give up their gender interests or subordinate them to class or party interests (Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 7). Many do not dare to challenge their superiors. This being so, it is little wonder that they are unable to advance a radical approach to the problems facing Ethiopian women.

In sum, decentralization in Ethiopia has not only strengthened the government's control over women's organizations at grassroots level, it has also has taken firm control over all activities that are initiated in the regional areas. It seems to be the ultimate tool to subject the broader mass of women and prevent their advancement. On the one hand it has managed to effectively enforce cultural practices that are counter-productive to women's empowerment and on the other it has prevented women from seeking redress. The WABs are equally incompetent and mainly seen as instruments of intimidation. They simply lack the mandate and capacity to promote women's rights in the regions.

Women's organizations and NGOs

One might wonder, given the overview on how the state intends to take the lead on women's emancipation in the country, what civil society is doing about it? Are they actively engaged, and do they have an agenda on women's rights? Most importantly, do they have room and freedom to advance their own agenda?

Civil society organizations, although small in size, have increased dramatically since 1994, from a mere 34 % to 67 % by 2000 (Rahmato 2002, p. 107). But not many are radical, nor are they gender sensitive. The country actually has very few women's organizations that focus specifically on women's issues. These include the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (EWLA) and Women Aid Ethiopia, which were among the first to be established. After 1995 a few more emerged, such as Women in Self Employment (WISE); the Kembatta Women's Self Help Centre, Ethiopia; SIKE Women's Development Association; Forum of African Women Educationalists; Ethiopian Media Women's Association; Women's Empowerment and Assistance Forum; Women's Support Organization; and so forth. In addition there are numerous locally-based organizations that have mother and child care programmes and health and social welfare services as their main areas of intervention. Among the most active agents on gender equality are those situated within NGOs that operate strong gender desks. These are in the main international organizations, but there are also a few local ones, including: Panos Ethiopia; Action Aid; Care International; Pact Ethiopia; and the Canadian International Development Agency (for details see WAD1999, Panos Ethiopia 2001, Hailu 1999).

As early as 1995 the government began its onslaught against civil society organizations, including women's organizations. The state is distinctly wary of these bodies, perceiving them as a direct threat to its political order, and this suspicion has been given effect in the numerous hurdles placed in the path of NGOs in the hope of

stifling their activities. Registration of NGOs has become difficult and project implementation and general operations are often stalled by state intervention. Many NGOs find themselves dictated to on their responsibilities, including the contribution of resources to state institutions (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 65). For example, one of the main requirements is 'that NGOs not only design, but also implement their programmes in collaboration with (if not through) local bodies – usually government structures' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 63). As a result, most NGO gender desks find themselves restrained, restricted, manipulated and even, on occasion, co-opted by the government to become engaged in specific activities.

The issue is not that the government has its own agenda on women's emancipation in the country; the problem arises when this agenda becomes *imposed* upon those who are actively involved in gender issues. Civil society should be permitted to focus on areas neglected by the state. Unfortunately, those who dare to do so find themselves seriously harassed, intimidated and silenced. EWLA was closed down when it dared to take the government to court for failure to uphold the laws in 2001. (For more information on this, see the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association's [2001], special issue of *Dimtsachen* on EWLA's suspension.) And while civil society is prevented from beginning any new innovative interventions, it is not uncommon to find its promising proposals and ideas being whisked away for trumped-up reasons and summarily handed over to parallel NGOs (government NGOs or GONGOs) set up by the state. GONGOs are national NGOs, 'nominally non-governmental but clearly EPRDF-driven' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 65). They include the various women's associations formed in the different regions by the government such as the Women's Democratic Association (WDA);¹⁴ the Amhara Women's Association; the Tigray Women's Association; and the Oromo Women's Association.

The establishment of government-led NGOs carries many risks for civil society. First of all, they have 'effectively succeeded in channelling all national and international resources to the ruling party's coffers' (Gudina 2003, p. 174). This has a decided impact on the availability of funds for independent NGOs. Second, GONGOs are known to enjoy more privileges and freedom from the government while NGOs are scrutinized on a regular basis, risking the withdrawal of their licence to operate. Third, the very presence of government players in the domain of civil society creates further loss of credibility and suspicion among the people (who may not differentiate between the two), a hostility that is also directed towards genuine civil society NGOs. Fourth, GONGOs in the main contribute to the general apathy among people who have lost their sense of trust in the work of NGOs. While the government made many promises to uplift their lives, the repression that followed and obligations that were imposed upon them created further rifts and more withdrawal. The result is that many women prefer not to be associated with the state in any manner (Wright 2000, p. 49, quoted in Gudina 2003, p. 112–113). Finally, the low standard of work performed by ill-qualified, inexperienced party cadres in the GONGOs undermines the quality of service delivery in the country. Scrutiny of GONGO project and organizational documents confirms that service delivery is extremely poor and that activities are carried out in a top-down manner. Indeed, one wonders how they remain accredited.

Few NGOs are engaged in high-level advocacy and lobbying (those that are include the EWLA, Action Professional Association for the People and Panos

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Ethiopia). And even then, their advocacy work centres around politically neutral areas of concern such as promoting the rights of the child, campaigning to end violence against women, or working for the eradication of harmful traditional practices (Rahmato 2002, p. 109). This clear avoidance of politically sensitive issues is linked to the government's intolerable stance and frequent expressions of hostility. An example is the petition campaign signed by various NGOs against the removal of the law on polygamous practices in the Oromia region (Tegegn 2007, p. 266). Many of the signatories were individually harassed and threatened. Under these restrictive circumstances, many organizations simply refrain from challenging the state; some have even stopped airing their views on policies imposed by the government. It is therefore, regrettable that there are not enough women's NGOs in the country and that among those that are indeed operational, only a few speak out on the rights of women (EWLA 2000, p. 5). If this situation continues, how can the government become sensitized to the reality that there is a strong and urgent need for feminism in the country? Will they ever see that women's issues are a legitimate area of political activism?

In 2005, in an effort to address the lack of academic training on gender-related issues, Addis Ababa University pioneered Ethiopia's first graduate programme on gender studies. However, the state maintains a firm grip on the content of the study material offered. Evidence is provided through the Ethiomedia interview with Professor Abigail Salisbury on how the state controls academic freedom in the country (Ethiomedia 24 April 2008). And though Salisbury was a lecturer in the Law Faculty at Mekele University, the same trend is observed in other universities throughout the country in other departments, including the Institute of Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University. Radicalism is decidedly unwelcome and lecturers who are known to have radical leanings are not even approached to do any teaching. Teaching staff are recruited mainly from India, and these lecturers often have little insight into the extent of political repression in Ethiopia. More often than not they lack formal training in feminist or gender-based studies (Belay 2007, p. 12). The general aim is to cultivate *passive* women's 'activists' who will learn to appreciate the government's input in the area and work hand-in-hand with the state.

A very serious problem among Ethiopian-based NGOs is the issue of networking. This is one of the most crucial components that NGOs must address because it will not only make their demands visible, but also boost their capacity to take up leadership roles and challenge the state. Hopefully, networking will also translate into a broad-based move by dedicated feminists who are prepared to lobby for their own agenda on the emancipation of women. They should refuse to become mere puppets in state-directed, depoliticized organs that currently side-step the substantive issues on the 'woman question' in Ethiopia.

Networking in the country at present is extremely weak. According to Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003, p. 71) this is possibly due to the fact that 'a culture of collaboration and co-operation has never been the hallmark of the voluntary sector in Ethiopia'. The planned voluntary establishment of networks in different areas of women's interests routinely collapse because of lack of commitment and collaboration efforts. There is one network under the umbrella of the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) with a membership of over 160 NGOs. These member organizations are mainly engaged in the areas of relief, rehabilitation and development activities particularly in rural areas (Tesfaye 1999, p. 31). Another

network, aimed to function at a higher-skilled level, is the National Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA), initiated by the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association in 2000. This network, however, faces equally serious obstacles in its operations and is unable to motivate its members into radical agents of change.

Besides the issue of networking among civil society actors on gender matters, an even more serious concern is the low level of cooperation between the government and civil society NGOs. This mutual hostility is part of the political climate in Ethiopia, where the ruling political party functions with the motto of: 'either you are with us or you are against us' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 120). This sinister 'with us', implies close collaboration with all government plans and policies and toeing the line as far as state directives are concerned. And even though some NGOs might be consulted in the government's policy planning process, their concerns and suggestions are never honoured. This not only illustrates 'the inadequate cooperation between NGOs and the government' in the gender field, but also the growing distrust between them (EWLA 2000, p. 6). Hussian *et al.* (1997) claim that this relationship is rather flimsy because both fronts spend as little time as possible in each other's company (mainly attending meetings, workshops or seminars) (Hussian *et al.* 1997, pp. 30–31). This level of hostility might well have increased the resentment of the government against civil society. The government tries its utmost to curb the operations of civil society organizations, with the express intention of closing them down (see the newly introduced Draft Law on Charities and Societies, Proclamation No. 00/2008).

In this manner, civil society development is slowly but steadily being arrested and curbed. Organizations working on the advancement of women are not only controlled in their activities, but collaboration between similar bodies is prevented, reducing the chances of building a critical mass. The government is a step ahead of every move civil society takes. Major problems are ahead with the looming introduction of the new draft law on NGOs.

Conclusion

Through the initiatives supposedly designed to increase women's advancement in society, the state's motives have become clear. All the measures that have been put in place (women's machinery and policy, constitutional rights and decentralization strategies) are *de facto* instruments of control, repression, direction and diversion. They are not meant to increase women's freedom and rights – instead they are engineered to rob women of these rights and keep them under rigid state control.

The EPRDF/TPLF government sees itself as all-powerful, the supreme authority on women's emancipation strategies. It has a clear goal and mandate and refuses to budge or to allow room for any diversion from this mandate. The initial distorted and misrepresented 'woman question' remains. Indeed it has not moved beyond the narrow policy implemented by the Derg, which saw women's active engagement in extractive and exploitative employment as a sign of their emancipation. The EPRDF/TPLF government, in similar vein, sees women's participation in government-designed endeavours as a sign of their emancipation. Women's increased access to education and employment (even if this is at the lowest levels) is the maximum it desires – and this it chooses to interpret as a sign of women's 'liberation' and 'freedom'. Substantive changes have never been considered of significance.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The EPRDF/TPLF has an intractable perception of the 'woman question' in Ethiopia, one in which there is no place for 'gender'. The term 'gender' is only used for foreign consumption. Within the country 'gender' has no place and is treated with hostility. Party cadres are given clear guidelines to continue using the word 'woman' and to follow the government's directions on all matters that involve women. This distortion is pushed upon society and justified as befitting its traditional make-up, where there is no room for 'gender'. The state blames Western radicals for attempting to inject alien habits into Ethiopia in the name of 'gender' reform. It sincerely fears that if gender issues were to receive attention women would become too radical and rise up against its oppressive rule. Therefore, it has made the de-politicization and deradicalization of women's issues one of its main concerns.

De-politicization and deradicalization of women's issues has been backed by the establishment of Ministry of Women's Affairs. The EPRDF/TPLF stubbornly insists that women's issues only concern women and should be solved by women alone. Such an attitude translates into giving the ministry little or no political support. The rationale is that as long as women's issues remain isolated from the rest of society, they will not be a threat to the political rule of the party. The problem will only emerge if 'gender' is allowed to take a front seat and begins a radical politicization of all women's issues, problems and concerns.

The main mission of the WAO/MoWA is to uphold the government's plans. This means that the tokenistic gender mainstreaming is a mere façade. Gender mainstreaming is often seen as an end in itself. It is still carried out in terms of 'making a plan to accommodate women', or 'fitting them in', instead of considering a complete overhaul of the system. The government's women's machinery is charged with containing the demand to 'overhaul'. The very issue of 'gender' (read 'women') being treated as a cross-cutting issue is grossly misunderstood, with the result that plans, policies and programmes remain deficient of any ground-breaking 'gender' (women's) concerns.

'Soft area' approaches on issues affecting women (maternal health, education, and employment) are treated as major achievements to mask the actual needs on the empowerment of women. Radical issues that could pose challenges to the political culture of society remain suspiciously out of sight. These include the structures of violence against women (abduction, rape, bride price, etc. that are for the most part embedded in the androarchal culture of societies), academic independence of learning institutions, freedom of expression, etc.

The top-down manner of government's operations seriously hampers dialogue between civil society and the state and prevents intervention from other role-players. Criticism has never been welcomed.

The EPRDF/TPLF has given shape to its National Women's Discourse. The ultimate motive of the government is to maintain its declared course and to guard it at whatever cost. The last hurdle was to take control of civil society, and this is currently being remedied with the drafting of a new draconian law, Ethiopian Charities and Societies, Proclamation No.00/2008. This draft legislation speaks for itself. It is clear that the government still refuses to see NGOs as development partners, advocacy agencies and training institutions. Only those involved in charities, relief initiatives and service delivery are acceptable. This draft places additional restrictions on the operations of women's organizations, including international organizations working on 'gender'. If it becomes law, the final obstacle

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

to EPRDF's/TPLF's women's discourse will be removed and the government will reign supreme on the 'women question'. GONGOs will become the main players in the field and the tokenistic gender discourse will effectively be removed and given shape in the form of a vanguard national women's discourse.

Notes

1. To use the word 'gender' is misplaced in the Ethiopian context, as the government persistently uses the word 'women'. This is what the author sets out to discuss.
2. The Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA), during the Derg regime, exploited women for the Derg's benefit without payment, using them as a labour pool and extracting financial gain from them. Quotas and rations were set to which each woman had to comply. Women were treated as private property, akin to slaves of the state.
3. The NWM was in fact a clear requirement emerging at the first World Conference on Women in 1975 and endorsed through the World Plan of Action. At the time, ambitions were high at global level and the assumption was that such machineries would be a temporary measure accelerating the achievement of opportunities for women and their full integration into the mainstream of national political, economic and social life (Moser 1993, p. 111, quoted in Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 8). The United Nations defines the National Machinery as: 'a single body or complex organized system of bodies, often under different authorities, but recognized by the government as the institution dealing with the promotion of the status of women' (Ashworth 1994, p. 5 quoted in Byrne *et al.* 1996, p. 8).
4. The MoWA has been given the following powers and mandates. It may:
 - initiate recommendations on the protection of the rights and interests of women at the national level, and follow up the implementation of same by devising strategies;
 - follow up, by designing strategies, that the preparation of policies, legislations, development programmes and projects by federal government organs give due consideration to gender issues;
 - ensure that opportunities are created for women to actively participate in political, economical and social activities;
 - undertake studies to identify discriminatory practices affecting women; submit recommendations on elimination of such practices and follow up their implementation;
 - submit recommendations on the application of affirmative measures in order to promote the participation of women in economic, social and political affairs by taking into account the oppression they faced for centuries as a result of inequality and discrimination;
 - ensure that the necessary attention is given to place women in decision-making positions in various government organs;
 - encourage and facilitate women to be organized, based on their free will and needs, with a view to defining their rights and solving their problems;
 - follow up the implementation of treaties concerning women and children and submit periodical reports to the concerned organs;
 - follow up and coordinate, at national level, the implementation of the country's policy on women's affairs;
 - sponsor studies and formulate and implement programmes and projects contribution to the improvement of the living conditions of needy women, and give the necessary support to organizations operating for achieving the said objective;
 - undertake studies to promote the well-being of mothers and children and implement same in cooperation with other organs; and
 - collaborate with non-governmental and civic organizations and women's associations on issues concerning women, and create conducive environment for their activities. (NAP-GE 2006).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

5. Women were granted the right to vote, together with men, by Emperor Haile Selassie in his revised constitution in 1955, without any struggle. At the time, this right was merely symbolic. The 1987 Constitution of the Derg regime was the first to enshrine the rights of women into law (Menghistu 1991, p. 167). Again, such rights remained on paper. The EPRDF's constitution seemed to have copied much from the Derg's in terms of rights and freedoms for the people, including article 35 on women's rights.
6. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) 1995.
7. Ibid.
8. Article 35(3) of the Ethiopian Constitution, 1995, p.93 reads: 'The historical legacy of inequality and discriminations suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account, women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures. The purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them to compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in politics, social, and economic life as well as public and private institutions.'
9. 'Customary laws are laws that are informed by customs and cultural ways of life of traditional societies and that includes attitudes of that particular community on gender relations' (Tegegn 2004, p. 17).
10. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) 1995.
11. Art. 9 (1), FDRE Constitution, 1995.
12. There are numerous documented cases of injustice against women by the legal system (Kebede 2004 pp. 77–81, Wolde-Giorgis 2004 pp. 86–97, Wolde-Giorgis 2000, pp. 113–126, EWLA 2001, pp. 16–18, EWLA 2002, EWLA n.d.).
13. Sara H. Longwe explained how the 'patriarchal cooking pot' operates in terms of policy evaporation especially when patriarchy feels threatened (Longwe 1999, pp. 69–72).
14. The Addis Ababa Women's Association (AAWA) is an arm of the TPLF/EPRDF government that emerged in 1994. It contains excellent *de jure* objectives such as; 'to facilitate the economic empowerment of the regions' women; to find and facilitate ways of improving their education and health; and to sensitize them about their constitutional and political rights' (Molla and Lulu n.d., p. 22). Actually, it is found imitating the footsteps of REWA in membership (women above the age of eighteen are eligible to become members), fee contribution and its structuring. It is estimated to have more than 73,000 members and structured along the government local administrative organs, namely at the regional, zonal, *woreda* and *kebele* levels. The association is instituted along various divisions that include the economic, social, mobilizing and organizing divisions (Tadesse *et al.* 2002, c44). And, though the AAWA claims to be currently independent from the government, it is found working in close collaboration with the WAO in identifying target groups for given WAO programmes (micro credits, training and education, health care and so on).

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An investigation into the maintenance of the Maale language in Ethiopia

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For centuries Maale, a minority language spoken in the Omo region of Ethiopia, has been in contact with Amharic, the dominant language and the language of wider communication in Ethiopia. In spite of this prolonged contact situation, there is very little evidence of a language shift taking place in the Maale speech community. This paper aims to give an account of the underlying social factors that have contributed to the maintenance of the Maale language. Ethnographic research, using participant-observation, field-notes, as well as intense interviews with key informants, was conducted in the Maale speech community. Paulston's theory of social mobilisation was applied to the findings of this research into the Maale language. An analysis of the data suggests that regional nationalism, which is isomorphic with ethnic groups in Ethiopia, such as the Maale, corresponds to ethnic nationalism of Paulston's model and is the reason why the Maale language has been maintained as a viable language in spite of centuries of political repression.

Introduction: the Maale language

The Maale language, which belongs to the Omotic language family (Unseth 1990), is spoken in the south-western part of Ethiopia. While most of the Maale are monolingual, those living in border areas also speak the cross-border languages. Within Maale there are a number of mutually intelligible, but distinct, dialects. The central dialect, spoken in Bala and Koibe, is understood by all the other varieties and regarded as the most important or 'purest' variety in Maale because it is believed to be the least affected by other languages (Amha 2000, p. 7). Historically, Bala is the seat of power and influence in Maale, the place from which the very powerful Maale king (*kati*) exercised his religious and political power throughout Maale land.

Considering the historical context of Maale, with its prolonged contact with dominant groups and languages in Ethiopia, especially Amharic, one might assume that language shift has taken place or even that the language would have died out. However, exactly the opposite is true. Currently, the Maale language is still alive and doing very well. According to Amha (2000, p. 3), the Maale language is not threatened by language shift or language death. None of the languages bordering the Maale region is used as a general *lingua franca* among the different ethnic groups in the region and very few Maale speakers are fluent in Amharic, the national language

of Ethiopia (cf. Woldemariam 2007, p. 212). In fact, most of the Maale people are still monolingual. Maale is still used in all social and religious domains as well as for local administration (Amha 2000, p. 3).

Historical context

Donham (1985, p.38) maintains that the Maale were ‘twice colonised’ by their northern neighbours and have been part of the Ethiopian economic system for over 2000 years. From about 500 BC until the fifteenth century, there was a continual southward expansion of the Abyssinian kingdom situated in the north of Ethiopia. This expansion of the Semitic north was motivated by a desire to increase their sphere of influence and gain access to and control of trade routes and goods found in the south and Omotic south-west (Donham 1985). According to Donham (1986, p. 70), the Maale region was probably conquered in the fifteenth century, making Maale a component of the vast and complex trading network that covered all of Ethiopia.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Cushitic Oromos started to spread out and conquer ethnic groups in central and southern Ethiopia, resulting in a severance of ties between the Christian north and the Omotic south-west. Trade routes to the south-west were cut off and the northern Semitic power started to disintegrate. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, Emperor Menelik II managed to reunite the Semitic-speaking north and, through conquest, Maale and the Omotic south-west were once again incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire.

This continual expansion of Abyssinia went hand-in-hand with the adoption of Amharic and the expansion of the Orthodox Church. The spread of Amharic, *lisane nigus* (the king’s language), was an integral part of this process of cultural transformation. For people in the peripheral regions, there was a strong political motivation for learning Amharic, for they could not claim rights that peasants traditionally enjoyed in central areas without speaking the language. As the Orthodox Church provided the spiritual blessing and guiding ideology for Abyssinian expansion, it was an important factor in the process of Amharisation. People on the periphery could become accepted as Amharas over generations through converting to Orthodox Christianity, adopting the Amharic language and transmitting this language to their children (Donham 1986, p. 13; Gudina 2003, pp. 1–2).

In spite of these pressures to shift towards the dominant language, the Maale language has been maintained for centuries. In the words of Amha (2000, p. 3): ‘[t]he Maale language is alive and well. It is presently not threatened by language shift or language death’. This article aims to investigate this situation and give an account of the underlying social factors that have contributed to language maintenance in the Maale speech community.

Language shift and language maintenance

The terms *language maintenance* and *language shift* were first used by Joshua Fishman in the academic year of 1963/64 (Fase, Jaspaert and Kroon 1992, p. 385). Language shift can be defined as a situation in which one language in contact with a more dominant language, within a nation, over a period of time, is partially or completely replaced by the dominant language. In other words, some or all of the former domains in which the language was used are replaced by the dominant language (De Vries 1992, Paulston 1994, Stoessel 2002, Weinreich 1968). This process usually includes several

phases of various degrees of bilingualism, without at the same time necessarily implying a loss of mother-tongue skills (Fishman 1985, in Stoessel 2002, p. 94).

In his survey of multilingualism in Africa, Batibo (2005, p. 102) gives a very comprehensive definition of language maintenance:

Language maintenance is a situation in which a language maintains its vitality, even under pressure. It implies, therefore, that the degree of resistance is strong enough to contain any pressure that may be coming from a dominant language. In a situation of language maintenance, the domains of language L1 remain largely the same and transmission of the language to the children is active and as perfect as possible. Moreover, the number of speakers remains relatively stable and they maintain a strong allegiance to their language. Language maintenance usually applies to a relatively monolingual situation. However, it may take place in a stable diglossic situation, in which the functions of L1 and L2 are well defined and remain unchanged.

The phenomena of language maintenance and shift do not have clearly defined borders, but should be thought of as a movement across a continuum ranging from language maintenance to language death (Stoessel 2002; Veltman 1991).

Most research on the topic attempts to answer the question why some languages survive when in contact with a dominant language over time, and why others do not. A central issue is the resistance that some languages show to being replaced by another language. In other words, why is it that certain languages in prolonged contact with a dominant language endure over time while others shift to the dominant language?

The theory of social mobilisation

Many theories have been proposed to account for the phenomena of language shift and maintenance (cf. Allard and Landry 1992, Edwards 1992, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor 1977, Pandharipande 1992, Paulston 1994). The research reported in this article is underpinned by Paulston's theory of social mobilisation, a dynamic model that aims to account for ever-changing social conditions.

Paulston's (1994) theory of social mobilisation, which relies on qualitative research methods, offers a framework which can be used for predicting language maintenance and shift outcomes, as well as for explaining why some languages survive in a contact situation while others die out. Changing social conditions and their historical relationships to underlying social determinants are an integral part of her theory.

According to Paulston (1994), minority languages which are in contact with dominant languages within a 'modern nation-state' will maintain their linguistic stability if they encompass the set of behaviours, attitudes and perceptions that are associated with nationalism. In an attempt to explain and predict the language behaviour of groups that have access to, or are exposed to, more than one language in multilingual states, Paulston (1994) argues that there are four types of social mobilisation, which under certain specified social conditions result in different linguistic outcomes: namely, ethnicity, ethnic movements, ethnic nationalism and geographic nationalism. These types, which are set out below, form a continuum and should not be seen as four discrete types.

Ethnicity

An 'ethnic group' is a reference group invoked by people who share a common historical style, based on overt features and values. Through the process of interaction

with others, they identify themselves as sharing that style. 'Ethnic identity' is the sum total of feelings on the part of group members about those values, symbols, and common histories that identify them as a distinct group. According to Royce 1982 (in Paulston 1994, p. 30), ethnicity is in essence ethnic-based action.

Paulston (1994, p. 31) identifies the defining characteristics of ethnicity as an emphasis on a common biological past, common roots and common ancestors (factual or fictional), commonly-held cultural values, ideas and beliefs (which are unconsciously learned behaviour). Ethnicity is a matter of being born into a particular society and is generally taken for granted. Personal identity is linked to ethnicity and is based on culture. As a factor, Paulston does not consider ethnicity to be sufficient to withstand language shift in a multilingual setting if the dominant group allows assimilation and there are incentives to assimilate and access to the dominant language.

Ethnic movement

Paulston (1994, p. 32) claims that ethnic movement, as a type of social mobilisation, develops when ethnicity as an unconscious identity turns into a conscious, deliberate strategy, usually in competition for limited resources. Ethnic movement can be described as 'ethnicity turned violent', which is manifest in a power struggle with a dominant group for social and economic advantages. Ethnic movements tend to base their claims on equality and fairness and resistance is drawn along ethnic boundaries. Ethnicity emphasises the content of the culture, whereas ethnic movements emphasise ethnic boundary maintenance. Ethnic movements usually have a charismatic leader (usually born as a member of the group) and they emphasise a glorious past that is part of their consciousness. They use language as a rallying point: the mother tongue can be a very powerful symbol of unification. Paulston (1994, p. 35) argues that language is a very important symbol of the nation. To acknowledge and to allow language shift is to be disloyal and the accepted wisdom is that the inner thoughts of the people can only be adequately expressed in the mother-tongue. Ethnic movements alone are not sufficient to withstand language shift in a multilingual setting but they can cause a slow-down of language shift.

Ethnic nationalism

When ethnic discontents turn separatist, ethnic nationalism arises. Paulston (1994, p. 34) draws on Cottam's (1964) definition of nationalism in her model, which asserts that nationalism is best interpreted as the manifestation of nationalistic behaviour. A nationalist is seen as 'an individual who sees himself as a member of a political community, a nation that is entitled to independent statehood, and is willing to grant that community a primary and terminal loyalty' (Paulston 1994, p. 34). The main characteristics of both ethnic and geographical national movements are group loyalty and group cohesion. The stimulus for ethnic nationalism often comes from the middle classes whose economic interests and power depends on the economic well-being of the nation-state.

Geographical nationalism

Paulston (1994, p. 37) contends that access to territory is an important difference between ethnic movement and ethnic nationalism. She argues that, without land,

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

nationalism movements cannot succeed and that the feasibility of separatist movements depends on access to territory.

Paulston's distinction between ethnic and geographical nationalism shares features with Hans Kohn's *open* and *closed* nationalism (Kohn 1968 in Paulston 1994, p. 37). She contends that the difference between ethnic, or closed, nationalism and geographic, or open, nationalism is that in ethnic or closed nationalism the ethnic group is isomorphic with the nation-state. The emphasis is on the nation's indigenous character, on its common past and common culture in contrast with open or geographical nationalism that rejects these notions and affirms emancipation, assimilation, and individualism. Geographical nationalism is territorial-based and made up of a political group of people, comprising a nation that does not depend on ethnic descent (Paulston 1994, p. 37). Another important difference between ethnic nationalism and geographical nationalism is that, in the case of geographical nationalism, language is not necessarily the most important symbol of the nation (Paulston 1994, p. 38).

In essence, her argument is that ethnicity and ethnic movements are not sufficient types of social mobilisation to halt language shift, but that the set of behaviour, attitudes and perceptions that we associate with nationalism provides the sufficient condition for minority language maintenance. Paulston (1992, p. 60) also states that economic incentives are probably a necessary but not sufficient condition for language maintenance, but again that the set of behaviour, attitudes and perceptions which we associate with nationalism provides the sufficient condition.

Paulston claims that her theory applies to 'modern' nation-states. An issue that needs careful consideration is whether, or to what extent, her model can be applied to minority groups living in contemporary nation-states that cannot be regarded as 'modern'. There are still many minority groups (communities of people) in Africa, and elsewhere, like the Maale people of Ethiopia, that do not fit into Paulston's concept of 'modern'. Typically, these communities are unaffected by popular trends of modernity. They still adhere to traditional religions, ideas and methods of hunting, cooking, house-building, food-gathering etc. Generally speaking, research into language maintenance and shift amongst such groups has been neglected.

Social factors underlying the maintenance of Maale

In order to determine why language shift has not taken place in the Maale language as would have been expected, a study was undertaken using classical ethnographic research methodology, including participant-observation, field-notes, as well as intense interviews with key informants (Van Aswegen 2008). Four salient social factors were examined in the light of Paulston's (1994) theory of social mobilisation. These four factors are linked to Maale nationalism and are viewed from the wider socio-cultural, historical and sociolinguistic context of Ethiopia.

Maale nationalism

The Maale people have a long history of resisting their conquerors. Sometimes resistance was not active, as they waited for the right opportunity to present itself, and at other times resistance turned violent. Although the Maale people do not have the numbers to form a liberation front like the Oromos, their feelings are just as intense, and they have often displayed an extraordinary ability to adapt to

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

circumstances and employ new strategies to resist those that they think are intending to take away their identity. The Maale people have a saying, *gaali nuuko saa aтем tooko gammatao helandya koysuwase* (the Amharas should not touch our hair or our land). This study has identified a number of strategies they employed, at different times in their history, in an attempt to safeguard their identity, their freedom and their land: (1) the rejection of Orthodox Christianity during the time of Menelik II and Emperor Haile Selassie (2) not allowing intermarriage with Amharas, (3) taking sides with the Italians during their occupation; (4) not responding to military call-ups during the Derg and the rejection of the Derg's concept of 'mother land'; (5) the rejection of the Derg's division of Maale territory into three parts and the continual commitment to a struggle to see the amalgamation of all the traditional regions back into Maale land; (6) not taking part in the Ethiopian elections of 1995 and 1999, and then taking part in the 2005 elections; (7) boundary maintenance strategies, such as not allowing intermarriage with other ethnic groups; (8) language loyalty and group loyalty (e.g. the rejection of anyone who does not transmit the Maale language and cultural values to his children); and (9) an emphasis on a different cultural identity.

1. *Rejection of Orthodox Christianity*

The rejection of Orthodox Christianity during the time of Menelik II and Haile Selassie was one of the most important factors in maintaining Maale nationalism. For centuries, the Orthodox Church played a central role in the Ethiopian state and a predominant role in defining who and what Ethiopians were. Therefore, the thinking of the Ethiopian rulers was that if someone clung to or converted to another religion, he was, in effect, rejecting Ethiopian nationalism (Donham 1999, p. 143). In more recent times the Derg also adopted Orthodox Christian culture and joined forces with the Orthodox Church in an attempt to stamp out Evangelical Christianity in the south (Donham 1999, p. 142). However, the persecution of the evangelical Church in Maale by the Derg led to the Maale Christians, who had initially supported the Derg, stopping their support of the Derg and starting to oppose them. As the Evangelical Church grew stronger, it became a force for the maintenance of Maale nationalism.

2. *Intermarriage with Amharas*

As it was important for Maale nationalism to reject Orthodox Christianity, so it was important that intermarriage with Amharas should be 'outlawed' in order to prevent the Amharisation of the Maale people. Throughout the centuries intermarriage with Amharas was severely censured in Maale society, as it would have meant acceptance of the Orthodox religion and cultural assimilation.

3. *Taking sides with the Italians*

Taking sides with the Italians during their occupation of Ethiopia (1935–41) created the opportunity for the Maale people to be freed from Amhara oppression. Before the Italian invasion, the Maale elite, the authority of the king, lords, sub-lords and lineage elders had been progressively undermined, and ordinary Maale people were exploited as *gebbar* ('tribute-payers'). Under Amhara rule all the officials, from the provincial governor to the sub-provincial governor to the holders of *gult* grants with

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

their entourage of ordinary soldiers, received the right to demand goods and services of Maale families, called *gebbar* (Donham 1986, p. 85). Many Maale felt that the Italians gave their lives back to them.

4. *Rejection of the 'mother land' notion*

One of the ways in which the Maale people show that they see themselves as a nation, is their strong sense of being linked to the land. They see the Maale region as their *ado achi*, 'father land'. Their primary loyalty lies in this land of their ancestral roots. Many Maale people do not want to be part of Ethiopia, and still do not consider themselves Ethiopian, nor do they believe that they should have a duty and responsibility to protect and defend Ethiopia, the so-called 'mother land'. For most people, the Maale region is their wealth, their land, their country, their world. When the Derg regime called upon the Maale people to fight and die for their 'mother land' in the war with Somalia (1977–1978), many refused to be part of a war that was not theirs. Their argument was that they could die for their 'father land' (Maale country), but could not understand why someone would expect them to die for a 'mother land' – a land towards which they felt no sense of belonging or any obligations to serve. Van Aswegen (2008, p. 62) comments:

The Maale society is paternalistic; only men can be the head of a family, a lineage or clan. Fathers, lineage elders and heads of clans have the power to bless and curse, and the right to inherit property belongs exclusively to men. This is most likely where the idea of their land or country as 'the father land' originated. The idea of 'mother land' for the Amhara culture existed for centuries. The reason why it is called 'the mother land' is because it is the mother who bears and raises the children that will occupy the land. In Amhara culture, the country is like a mother in which people are born and raised. This concept of 'mother land' was exploited during the Derg, when the military government called all the people of Ethiopia to stand as guards to protect 'the mother land'.

It is also considered a shameful thing for a Maale person to die in another country, anywhere outside of Maale territory. If a Maale person dies outside of Maale territory, either his body should be repatriated, or soil from his grave should be brought back to Maale. The Maale people informed those who tried to force them to fight in these wars, that if the fighting escalated to include Maale, only then would they fight and die for their 'father land'.

5. *The rejection of the division of Maale*

After they took control of Ethiopia in 1974, the Derg divided the Maale region into three regions, each region under a different *woreda* which included other ethnic groups from the region. There was considerable resistance to the enforcement of this division, and a struggle began for the incorporation of all of the traditional regions back into Maale land. The struggle to reverse the division of Maale is now based on the new Ethiopian constitution of 1995, which stipulates: 'Every Nation, Nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history', and the ultimate goal is greater autonomy on their own territorial base. Although the original goal of this nationalistic struggle was a separate independent nation-state, today, while they may still wish for independence, the Maale activists pursue more pragmatic goals that will give them greater autonomy within the Ethiopian state and preserve their identity and their language.

6. *Participation in elections*

The Maale people's turnout for the general elections of 1995 and 1999 in Ethiopia was extremely poor. Democracy was a new concept for many Ethiopians and most Maale people were just not interested. The Maale people had inaugurated a new king and they were experiencing a resurgence of traditional practices and customs. Voting at this stage would have been tantamount to accepting Ethiopian nationalism and a rejection of Maale traditional practises and customs. However, after suffering the consequences of not voting in this election, through having leaders appointed over them that they did not trust and who did not fulfil the promises they made to the Maale people, the 2005 elections saw many people involved in voting. They saw the election of 2005 as an opportunity to voice their discontent.

This is evidence that Maale people are starting to accept the fact that they will always be part of wider Ethiopia. In recent times, the Maale people were required to play the political game in order to survive. Not having the economic and military power, or the numbers for viable resistance movements, they had to look for other possibilities accessible to them to survive. Currently, there is relative peace in Maale. Power struggles tend to be more political, as the Maale people look for representation at local, regional and state levels.

7. *Boundary maintenance*

Boundary maintenance is very important if the Maale want to survive as an ethnic group. In Maale, boundary maintenance strategies are characterised by the following: the initial rejection of formal education because the people were scared that education might take their children from them; not allowing intermarriage with other ethnic groups, and especially with Amharas, because they do not want to lose their culture and identity; other ethnic groups are not welcome and were not allowed easy access to live in the Maale region, because the Maale people believed that they would 'contaminate' them; the way the Maale people stick together, for example, migration patterns within Maale territory rather than to regions outside of Maale, mean that the Maale people do not easily make friends with outsiders, they prefer to keep to themselves, live by themselves, sit together in schools and only speak to one another in the Maale language. Boundary maintenance in Maale reinforces Maale ethnic identity and the boundaries between the Maale people and the dominant Amharas. It is one of the factors that enable the Maale people to resist assimilation.

8. *Language and group loyalty*

Group and language loyalty is very important and anyone who is assimilated into another group is despised and not trusted. Generally, the Maale people feel that Maale is the only language in which they can adequately express themselves. It is their identity, what makes them Maale. In spite of political repression for centuries and the degrading of the Maale language during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Maale people refused to give up their language. When Maale people are far away from the Maale region, or even just outside the region in Jinka town, they seek out fellow Maale people for fellowship and any other assistance that might be needed as a result of being away from home. Parents are aware of the linguistic influences of neighbouring languages on the Maale language and take great care to teach their children the 'correct' words, pronunciation and accents. The main difference

between the Maale people and other ethnic groups in the region is that the Maale people have a distinct language, which separates them from other ethnic groups. This linguistic distinction is what enables them to use language as a resource to unite against perceived enemies, apparent injustices and outside domination. It seems as if Maale language maintenance has always been regarded as an important aspect of resisting assimilation and integration into the dominant Amhara language and culture.

The Maale community use their language to transmit their cultural values to their children. Fathers teach their sons and mothers teach their daughters about themselves, their history, the kings and lords, their relatives and family roots. They also teach them about marriage and which families are not appropriate for marriage, about funeral ceremonies and which farm land is suitable for the family to use etc. The Maale people teach their children through songs which tell of their ancestors, their fathers, how rich and powerful they were, how they communicated with others and how they were respected; also how they are to respect authority and what their duties in Maale tradition, custom, culture and land are. A father will tell his sons the names of the animals he has killed, what kind of bees he uses to make honey and the number of cattle he has raised. The children love these songs and listen attentively to the lessons they hold, often asking for the stories to be repeated. They sing their songs while grinding grain and the children remember and learn the stories. Parents fully expect their children to transmit the cultural values they taught them, to their children. A case in point is the example of Maderiya Kelebo, who became a government school teacher, went to Gofa where he lived and married a Gofa woman, and whose children could not speak Maale. During the recent elections, he returned to Maale to stand as a candidate in the elections. No one wanted to talk to him, nor would anyone vote for him. In fact, the people opposed him, saying that he had lost his identity and rejected his culture. His own family even opposed him, telling him: 'You are not a part of Maale.' Parents also take care to teach their children the 'right' way of speaking the Maale language, with the 'correct' accent. If they do not use the 'correct' words or pronunciation, they ask them: 'Why are you speaking like the blacksmiths?' Parents are aware of where 'good' Maale is spoken and where not. It would be totally unacceptable for parents to speak to their children in the home in a language other than Maale (others would ask: 'What is wrong with this man? Is he trying to make his family Amhara?').

The Maale people communicate with one another in the Maale language when in a cross-cultural setting, even in towns like Jinka and in Addis Ababa. They also seek out fellow-Maale people for fellowship and for any other support that they might need as a result of being away from home. Maale children who go to Jinka for further education communicate with one another in Maale and also stick together socially. English is sometimes preferred above Amharic between ethnic groups in Jinka, because this gives them more prestige and no one speaks good English anyway. This is especially true of teenagers, who have also adapted their style of dress to be more like that of people living in cities. However, they only communicate in the Maale language amongst themselves. Maale children do not mix easily with Amharic children or children from other ethnic groups and prefer to keep to themselves. Friendships between Maale children and children from other ethnic groups are rare. The language of the church is Maale. When the Amharic Bible is read, it is translated into the Maale language, and when preaching is in Amharic, it is

also translated into the Maale language. Discussion on political issues occurs in the Maale language, and when the people need advice or counsel they always go to another Maale person, usually a friend, a church member or one of the village elders. Communication within families is exclusively in Maale. There is a general feeling that Maale is the only language in which they can adequately express themselves. It is their identity, what makes them Maale.

9. External distinction and internal cohesion

The Maale people place great emphasis on a different cultural identity, different to that of other surrounding ethnic groups, and especially to that of the Amharas, who are traditionally seen as cruel, untrustworthy, liars and the ones who introduced venereal diseases and other evils into Maale.

The Maale people are proud of their traditions and culture and believe that they are an example to the other tribes in the region. People from outside always come to them for something, not the other way round. They do not want to pay taxes because they have their own king. They are unique in the Omo-Zone, being the only ones who hunt with bow and arrows. Something else which is unique to Maale is their knife, which they wear tied to their waist. They have clothes made out of cotton, *bulluko*, and their *teff*, coffee, butter and honey are in demand.

The Maale informants in this study claimed that the Maale do not steal or tell lies and, according to them, evidence for this is that even in courts, the word of a Maale person is regarded as the truth which is also well-known by government officials and traders. They are characterised by both insiders and outsiders as a strong, close-knit community and as being honest, reliable people. If a Maale person picks up someone else's belongings, he hangs them on a tree for the owner to find. Some would argue that this is changing.

From the Maale people's viewpoint, the difference between the Maale people and their neighbours, the Aari people, is that in Aari the culture and religion of their conquerors was imposed upon the people. The Aari people were forced to follow the Orthodox Christian faith and many of the Aari people adapted their culture to the Amharas' culture. The Maale continued to resist outside influence, and today there are only three struggling Orthodox Churches in the whole of Maale.

Very much a part of Maale consciousness is the notion of a 'glorious past'. Their 'glorious past' is an important part of their belief in themselves as a people. Still today, the Maale people teach their children through songs about their ancestors, their fathers, and how rich and powerful they were, which is in line with Paulston's (1994, p. 54) view of ethnic nationalism, that an important characteristic of nationalists is that '[t]heir glorious past is an important part of their present'.

Discussion of social factors

The research findings set out in the section above present a strong case for a link between nationalism and the maintenance of the Maale language, although they do not necessarily articulate perfectly with Paulston's (1994) theoretical framework.

If Paulston's (1994) theory was intended to apply to modern 'nation-states', can it apply to Maale which is not a 'modern' nation-state? Generally speaking, the Maale community has been, and is still, very much unaffected by so-called progressive trends of modernity. In addition, separatist movements, a well-developed middle

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

class and an intellectual elite are part of the defining characteristics of ethnic nationalism. The Maale speech community displays none of these three features in the typical sense.

The Maale people do not have separatist movements and are not likely to ever have them, since they number only approximately 60,000 people and lack the military resources, might and finances required to form a liberation front. The results of such an uprising would spell economic, political and social demise. It would, however, seem that the intense feelings and attitudes of dissatisfaction towards those that they perceive as trying to rob them of their identity, are the same feelings and attitudes that lead to separatist movements.

Maale society also lacks a 'middle class' in the modern sense of the concept, but one can talk about the traditional Maale elite, which could possibly correspond to the middle class. The elite, in the past, and also to a certain extent today, are the king, lords, sub-lords, clan leaders, heads of families and owners of large portions of land. Donham (1990, pp.164–167) explains that during the Maale people's independence, the material power of kings, lords, sub-lords and lineage elders was entrenched in traditional customs and beliefs, whereby ordinary Maale people would pay tribute (in labour and in kind) to the elite. This tribute was justified by the belief that the king was responsible for the prosperity of all Maale territory, fields, people, and animals and also for defeating the power of their enemies. In order to preserve their wealth, power and influence, embedded in traditional beliefs and customs, it was important for the Maale elite to maintain and promote a sense of Maale nationalism. In turn, for ordinary Maale people, nationalism was a way to safeguard their prosperity. This convergence of interest of the Maale elite and ordinary Maale people resulted in a formidable force to maintain Maale nationalism. After the incorporation of Maale into the Ethiopian state the influence of the Maale elite weakened but the end of the Derg (1991) also marked a resurgence of traditional beliefs and customs and renewed interest in Maale nationalism.

Paulston (1994, p. 56) asserts that nationalism movements need intellectual leaders. Although Maale recently saw the emergence of intellectual leaders amongst the educated, intellectual leaders have not been part of Maale society in the past. Instead of intellectual leaders, the Maale people had spiritual leaders, like the *Mekana goda* and others that performed sacrifices and rituals on behalf of the Maale people. They were responsible for giving direction and inspiration to the Maale people. However the influence of such people is on the decline and might, in the future, be replaced by the educated.

Although the term 'modern nation-states' could be applicable to Ethiopia as a sovereign state, one cannot really conceive of ethnic groups such as the Maale and many other ethnic groups living in remote, southern parts of Ethiopia as belonging to 'modern nation-states'. The Maale are definitely not modern, and on the surface it might seem as if ethnic groups such as the Maale who live in the remote, southern parts of Ethiopia, are cases of what Paulston would call 'ethnicity'. However, Paulston states that ethnicity alone will not maintain a language in a multilingual setting if the dominant group allows assimilation, and if opportunity to access and incentive to learn the second language are present. It was noted above that the dominant Amharas allowed assimilation and that incentives and opportunities to learn Amharic were great. Nevertheless, the Maale community did not adopt Amharic but have maintained their language. Consequently, the argument put

forward in this article is that Paulston's theory may also apply to non-modern ethnic groups, like the Maale, and that the Maale is a case, not of ethnicity, but of ethnic nationalism. The ideals of Ethiopian nationalism (one nation—one state) never appealed to many ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Nationalism, a European concept, has never fitted sub-Saharan Africa (personal correspondence with Paulston). Therefore, the proposition put forward is that the regional nationalism in Ethiopia, which is isomorphic with ethnic groups like the Maale, corresponds with the 'ethnic nationalism' of Paulston's model.

Ethnic nationalism in Maale has been clearly demonstrated in the rejection of Orthodox Christianity; marriage patterns of endogamy; taking sides with the Italians during their occupation of Ethiopia; rejection of the Derg's 'mother-land' concept; rejection of the division of Maale; not participating in the Ethiopian general elections in 1995 and 1999; voicing discontent by voting against the current government to voice their discontent; boundary maintenance strategies; language and group loyalty and internal cohesion and external distinction.

Conclusion

A recurring theme among the factors underlying language maintenance in Maale is the strong sense of pride and identity found in the Maale people. Maale territory, or 'the father land', is where their primary loyalties lie. The Maale people have a history of resisting Ethiopian nationalism, and at different times in their history they implemented various strategies to preserve their identity, their freedom and their land. The Maale people are a proud people, proud of their traditions and culture, and consider themselves as an example to the other tribes in the region. Outsiders view the Maale people as unified, disciplined and honest. For the Maale people, the Maale language is the language that speaks to their hearts, the language they understand best and the language in which they can adequately express themselves; it is their identity that makes them Maale. Networks have a very strong stabilising affect on language usage and culture in Maale. The most noteworthy networks that the Maale people have are the various ways in which they work together. Interestingly, Evangelical Christianity, and not Orthodox Christianity, has brought far-reaching changes to the Maale people and society. Many traditionalists feel that the Christians undermine their values, customs and belief system. The Christians' contribution to Maale society was the creation of modern social structures and procedures, improved infrastructure and a focusing of attention on the importance and value of education.

In this article evidence was presented that supports the hypothesis that a strong sense of nationalism is the main factor in the maintenance of the Maale language. From the evidence that was presented, it could be argued that Paulston's (1994) theory of social mobilisation can be applied to non-modern nation-states, such as the Maale, by extending her theoretical framework. The argument proposed in this article is that the regional nationalism, which is isomorphic with ethnic groups in Ethiopia like the Maale, corresponds to the 'ethnic nationalism' of Paulston's model and is the reason why Maale has been maintained as a viable language in spite of centuries of political repression.

It appears that there are strong indications that the Maale people exhibit the basic defining characteristics of nationalism: that is, access to territory, an emphasis

on group loyalty, a common enemy, cultural external distinction and internal group cohesion, group loyalty and group cohesion, a goal of self-determination, or greater autonomy in the case of Maale, and a perception of themselves as a nation. Maale ethnic nationalism is an extension of Paulston's model in that Maale is not a modern nation-state; instead of separatist movements, the Maale people display the same attitudes and intense feelings that lead to separatist movements; instead of a strong middle class, the Maale people have the powerful elite, whose privileges, power and influence depend on the welfare of Maale; and instead of intellectual leaders, the Maale have spiritual leaders to guide and direct them.

It remains to be seen what effect modernisation will have on the Maale people and language. Paulston (1994, p. 29) states that her four types of social mobilisation represent a continuum, and not four distinct types. Groups can fit into a different type of mobilisation at different stages of their history and also move back and forth on the continuum. Modernisation in the Maale region may result in Maale nationalism and, in effect, Maale language maintenance becoming less important, as the Maale people learn Amharic for socio-economic and educational rewards. But at present, the Maale language appears to be functioning in all of its former domains, and is not threatened by language shift.

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The EPRDF *vis-à-vis* Ethiopia's development challenges

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This article is about the major development challenges that Ethiopia faces. It also provides a critique of the policies that the government of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) follows to 'mitigate' them. It highlights the magnitude of these problems that have accumulated throughout the reigns of the three post-war governments and shows how bottlenecks have arisen in the transition process from unfreedom to democracy, and from poverty to prosperity. I have identified five major challenges, namely: lack of political democracy, gender inequality, environmental degradation, unchecked population growth, and the crisis of rural development. I argue that in as far as Ethiopia is unable to surmount these challenges, it will be impossible to do away with poverty and there can be no development. I see political democracy and freedom as key to surmount poverty and I therefore argue that as long as the EPRDF government suppresses freedom and rejects political democracy, it is unlikely that Ethiopia's ongoing situation of poverty and under-development will be resolved.

Introduction

The economic record of seventeen years of military rule was to prove an unmitigated disaster. By almost every major index of economic growth, the country retreated rather than advancing forward. Wrong-headed policies, war, environmental degradation, a rapidly growing population, adverse external development, and a number of other factors combined to drive the economy to the edge of the precipice. Towards the end of its rule the government began to read the handwriting on the wall. (Chole 2004, p. 193)

Under-development is not absence of incremental change *in toto* in the economic sense but the incompatibility of that incremental change with the demographic, political and social changes required for the provision of a better life for the population at large. In that relative sense, the state of poverty and under-development that was rampant in Ethiopia under the military rule has not improved under the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In fact, it appears that poverty and under-development have increased and that Ethiopia is now worse off than it was under the military Derg as some surveys suggest (UNDP's Human Development Reports since 1987; World Bank 2005). From Eshetu Chole's statement above, one has only to substitute 'the EPRDF' for 'the military' to describe the current state of poverty, under-development and political crisis in the country.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Ethiopia's standing according to the UN's Human Development Index (HDI) has been consistent ever since the Human Development Report began in the early 1980s. In 1983 the Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contended that Norway was the best place to live in and Ethiopia the worst. By 1987, Ethiopia ranked 111 out of 130, in 1995 it stood at 169 out of 174 and in 2005 it stood at 170 out of 177 (UNDP 1983, 1987, 1995 and 2005). Indeed, a country's HDI ranking can be taken as one indicator of its poverty and under-development. The measurements and criteria of under-development used in the HDI is a clear break from the erstwhile economic-reductionist view of development that had been dominant for too long. The reductionist school used economic criteria only as indicators of development such as GNP/GDP. The HDI changed this. The meaning of development is no longer merely economic growth: it also includes political and social issues and indicators such as the state of human rights, women's rights and environmental protection.

Although it does not represent a major shift from the criteria used by the UN, the HDI standards of well-being and quality of life are now real indicators of human development. Well-being and quality of life both deal with real issues involving the deprivation of communities and individuals in a comprehensive way. People become poor when their capabilities to overcome the problems that they face in order to live a decent life are deficient. Though what is visible in poverty is the material deprivation in terms of basic human needs such as food and shelter, in fact material deprivation is a symptom of the principal deprivation at the level of social and political capabilities. Ethiopia's poverty can only be described in this manner since two gigantic obstacles are the main factors for the deprivation of the capabilities of communities and individuals. These obstacles are the prevailing political and social structures. Apart from food and shelter, humans need security and peace to live without fear and threat, and political rights to regain all capabilities of which they may artificially be deprived. Ethiopians live in an uninterrupted state of fear and intimidation. The demand for human and democratic rights has always been met with ferocity. Their lives are totally controlled by a body completely alien to them – the 'state'. The obsession of the 'state' is to control, but it is inept when it comes to generating development. The people are neither let free to control the factors that determine their lives and generate development in their own way nor is the state capable of generating it.

One means of regaining deprived capabilities and therefore of empowerment is education. For individuals and communities there is a certain level of knowledgeability that is required of them in order to live a life of conscious involvement (producing and reproducing, for instance) and most of all in order to make informed choices, both in their day-to-day lives and in making political choices that are of a strategic and long-term nature but that affect them as part of the collective as a whole. Education is knowledge and knowledge is power. It is through education that social capital can be built as a crucial base for an emerging civil society and social development as a whole. The fact that poverty in Ethiopia prevails indicates the low level of social capital whose basis is knowledgeability that in turn can only be acquired through formal or civic education. The state of education in Ethiopia is one of the poorest in the world.

The health profile is equally bad. Health care has simply never matched population growth and as a result public spending on health has not increased.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Ethiopian society is ridden with major diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and so on. People contract diseases that are easily controllable but due to lack of civic education on health and sufficient investment in the health care system they suffer and many die an early death.

Of 1.9 million children born each year, 230,000 (12%) die before reaching their first birthday; another 160,000 (8%) die before their fifth birthday. Major causes of death in infancy and early childhood are acute respiratory infection, diarrhoea, nutritional deficiencies and measles. These account for 80 % of deaths of children under the age of 5 years. (EEA 2000, p. 107)

Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate the magnitude of the problem of public health and poverty in Ethiopia. Figure 1, as well as the World Bank's 2005 Report on Well-being and Poverty in Ethiopia, show that Ethiopia has not fared any better during the EPRDF period and that poverty has not been reduced at all.

Ethiopia's state of poverty is indissolubly connected to the general state of unfreedom in a number of ways. As recent development theories have it, poverty as a totality of capability-deprivation is also related, in the case of Ethiopia, to the low level of knowledgeability of society about the conditions that govern its existence. A high level of illiteracy, prevalence of tradition and traditional practices heavily impacting on depriving the capabilities of women and children in particular, insufficient levels of modern education and the low level in quality of the existing modern education system all add up to deprive society of its awareness of the conditions that govern its existence.

Freedom disentangles the social inertia of the hitherto marginalized. Freedom opens the road to free participation, free expression, and the development horizon in general. With freedom people can express their creativity as it is freedom that unleashes the ingenuity of humans. In Ethiopia, it is this particular aspect that has been stifled for too long by the authoritarian regimes. The EPRDF is no exception.

It is now necessary to investigate the areas of development that are crucial for Ethiopia's poverty and see how society is prevented from participating in alleviating it. That is the link between poverty and unfreedom as a hurdle for popular participation and as a fetter to the emergence of civil society. Both in the immediate and long-term sense, there are issues that require solutions on the one hand but which cannot be attained without the popular participation, i.e. participation by the civic sector. As we will see, the dominance of the government as the sole actor of development and poverty eradication has led the country astray. Let us now examine these challenges, namely: lack of freedom/political democracy; gender inequality; environmental degradation; unchecked population growth; and the crisis of rural development.

Table 1. Major indicators of health status in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Indicators	Sub-Saharan Africa	Ethiopia
Infant mortality rate	97/1000	111/1000
Child mortality rate	114/1000	161/1000
Maternal mortality rate	7/1000	10/1000
Life expectancy	50 years	48 years
Access to safe water	51%	25%

Source: UNDP, 1997, p. 131

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

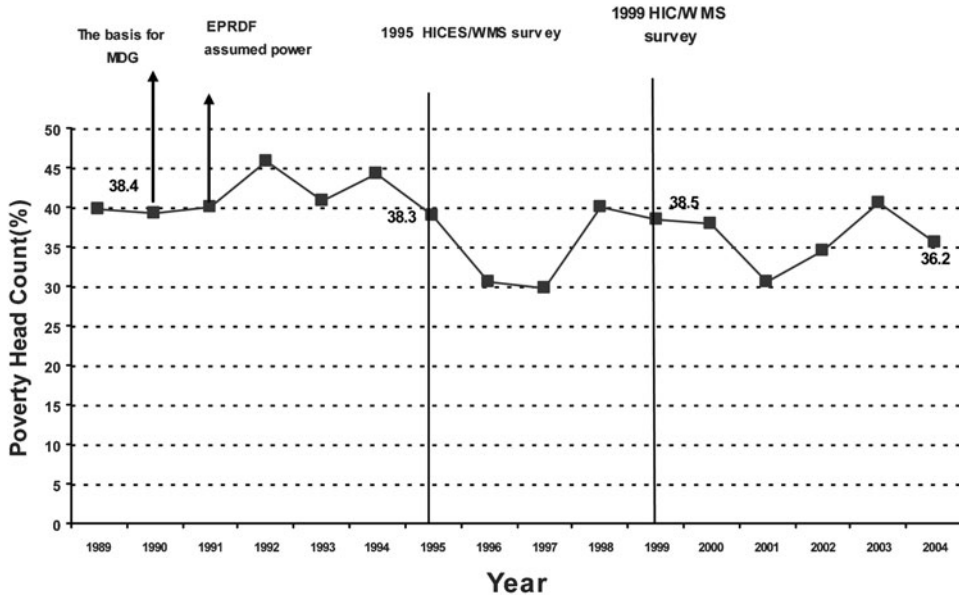


Figure 1. Evolution of poverty incidence between 1989 and 2004 (World Bank 2005, p. iii).

Lack of freedom and political democracy

Has the present government ‘delivered’ on the challenges facing the country? Regrettably the record of the EPRDF on political democracy has thus far been dismal. Suppression of official opposition and imprisoning its leaders, literally banning civic organizations by law (see the new draft law on civic associations), closing down the independent media, controlling or abolishing trade unions, stealing elections and clamping down on the opposition, killing close to 400 persons and jailing close to 11,000 persons in labour camps, and so on, are the well-known record of the EPRDF on rights and political democracy. This practice is strictly in line with the EPRDF’s hotchpotch formula called ‘revolutionary democracy’, which in content is neither revolutionary nor democratic. Although the prime minister pretends to be knowledgeable and theoretical, we have not witnessed anything that resembles a conceptual construct to elaborate or support this formula that is declared to be the creed of the EPRDF.

Democracy and freedom constitute the pivotal key link to Ethiopia’s development. All the three post-war regimes have suppressed freedom and denied society the fruits of democracy. As a consequence, Ethiopian society wallows in a mire of abject poverty, under-development and sporadic famines. In face of this historical necessity, the EPRDF’s principal agenda is setting up mechanisms to deprive society of freedom. The two-track policy that it had followed until 2005 constitutes an official and constitutional recognition of freedom but its suppression in practice using a number of techniques. The 2005 election was a landmark in the contemporary political history of the country, in which society displayed its utter disgust and opposition to the EPRDF regime. In the post-2005 situation, therefore, the EPRDF is displaying its true colours and makes no pretence of being democratic.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The new law on associations (i.e. civic associations) that makes forming a civic organization impossible is one example. This will undoubtedly have further implications, particularly in exacerbating poverty and under-development.

The prevailing unfreedom has also generated a great deal of conflict. Most of this is social in nature but takes the form of ethnic disputes. Despite the EPRDF's rhetoric on proclaiming the right of Ethiopia's ethnic groups to self-determination including the right to secession, problems that arose as a result of ethnic inequality still prevail. The impact of these ethnic-based conflicts is enormous on Ethiopia's beleaguered economy, clearly indicating that political problems created by unfreedom directly contribute to exacerbating poverty and under-development.

Gender inequality

Poverty as capability-deprivation is starkly clear in the case of Ethiopian women. The deprivation of women's capabilities occurs in crucial categories of life, domains of life that determine not only choices (by women) and their agency but also their very existence. These categories are economic, social, ideological and political. Women's capabilities are deprived at all these levels. These deprivations occur mostly because women constitute the female sex, while some happen to women simply as members of society. On the other hand, these categories are also inter-related and reinforce each other; the deprivation at one level reinforces the other at a different level. The prevailing construction of sexuality and gender relations/roles, which is traditional through and through, for instance, constitutes deprivation at the ideological level and reinforces deprivations at the economic, social and political levels. Let us now see the state of the deprivations at various levels.

In Ethiopia's two major traditional modes of production, peasant farming and pastoral livestock production, women are largely deprived of property ownership. In peasant livelihood systems, land rights are mainly for men. Where women are entitled to own land, it is always men who benefit as women have no access to the land and farm income. In almost all pastoral communities, women have no right to property ownership. Lack of property rights and ownership in traditional formations has made women completely dependent on their husbands for their income. Lack of property ownership has debilitated the capabilities of women.

One important factor concerning the deprivation of women's rights at home and within society is discrimination in employment. Women workers, particularly in the service sector (mainly hotels and restaurants), are underpaid, and the numerous women domestic workers employed by individuals are paid even less. Unemployment among women is very high compared to that of men. The presence of women among the employed is minimal. This constitutes one category of deprivation while the level of their employment constitutes another. Within the same civil service for instance, a very high percentage of women civil servants work in the lower echelons as cleaners and coffee-servers and very few work in the administration and managerial posts. Though the low-level absorptive capacity for employment in the civil service and private sector affects both sexes, the gender bias that sees women as child-bearing and child-rearing also plays an important role in making the presence of women in the workforce small. Another factor is the low incidence of girls/women in education and vocational training. An unfavourable traditional attitude toward working women also exacerbates the small presence of women in the workforce.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Education enhances the knowledgeability of the woman, impacting on her power to make her own choice, whether in employment, in marriage or in deciding on the number of children she can raise in a life that is meaningful for her and the family. This has a direct influence on issues of population that in turn impact heavily on the state of poverty. Ethiopian women suffer from the worst form of social exclusion: lack of education. Traditional perceptions always require the boys to be sent to school, as the girl child is needed for the drudgery of domestic work. Those who struggle to go to school drop out for one reason or another, the major factors being having no time to study because of housework, early marriage and so on. Girls are expected to undertake a number of household chores that interfere with their education. A great many of them do all manner of tasks including cooking, cleaning, laundry and running errands. School enrolment in Ethiopia is like a pyramidal structure in which the relative number of girls dwindles as they move to higher institutions. Women and girls in Ethiopia are excluded from education, but what does that mean and how does that impact on the perpetuation of poverty and under-development? The cumulative effect of all these factors clearly shows that Ethiopian women are systematically deprived of their rights and capabilities. This in turn has a great impact on the deterioration of the state of poverty and under-development.

It is the social position that women occupy in society and their culturally defined functions that contribute to the deterioration of their health. Cooking is the most important function specifically designated to women. The other activities associated with cooking such as fetching water, collecting firewood, and wood- and charcoal-burning cause ill-health in most women. As Abonesh H. Mariam noted of rural women in the discussion journal *Reflections*:

Women in rural areas on the average spend 14–16 hours laboring under difficult conditions where the basic necessities such as clean water and fuel for cooking are not available. Fetching water and firewood means a long walk from home and back, often barefoot, carrying heavy loads on their backs or head for hours and negotiating difficult terrains. Moreover, they collect and wash/use contaminated water and cook in an air-polluted environment. Hence, women and their children spend most of their time in an unhealthy atmosphere that contributes greatly to ill-health. (Panos Ethiopia, 2000b, pp. 24–25)

In addition, when women fall ill, they delay seeking care for as long as possible as everything in the household depends on them. Abonesh continues: ‘When women fall sick, they delay care-seeking, as they give less priority to their personal needs. It is very common for women to wait until they are unable to move and do their daily chores’ (Mariam 2000, p. 25). In fact, this is also true of urban women.

The most universal form of violence against women (VAW) in Ethiopia is the prevalence of rape and marriage by abduction. Rape has now become the scourge of women from all walks of life and a national shame. The increasing rate of rape cases has exposed three fundamental facts: the pervasive nature of the pandemic; its dreadful implications (both physically and psychologically); and the alarming apathy of the EPRDF government and its law-enforcement agencies. Rape occurs throughout Ethiopia. According to the Ministry of Health document on gender mainstreaming in the health sector it is estimated that three women are raped each day in each of the 28 *woredas* (districts) in Addis Ababa, adding up to an alarming total of 30,660 rape cases every year (*The Reporter*, 19 March 2005). Another startling dimension of the pandemic is the widespread nature of the culprits. They come from all walks of life: peasants and pastoralists, rich and poor, elders and

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

youngsters, fathers, uncles, priests, sheikhs, soldiers, officers, police, politicians. In a care centre for victims of rape in Addis Ababa called the Integrated Family Services Organization (IFSO), ten of the first rape victims reported to the centre had been raped by their own fathers. One of the victims who shared a bed with her parents was raped by her father while the mother slept beside him in the same bed (*The Reporter*, 19 March 2005). In face of such a rampant threat, Ethiopian women live in a constant state of fear. What makes this fear so terrible is the fact that the attacker could be anyone.

In the era of AIDS, rape has reached extremely dangerous proportions as its victims, if infected with the HIV virus, will assuredly die an early and painful death. At the IFSO centre, among the first to report rape cases, out of 185 cases six were HIV-positive. It has been claimed that HIV-positive men deliberately infected girls and young women by raping them (Panos Ethiopia 2000a, p. 63). Despite the fact that women face a life of such terror, the EPRDF government and its law enforcement agencies have displayed an alarming apathy. Even more shocking is the fact that the Women's Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office and one of its parastatals, the Addis Ababa Women's Association, withdrew from the anti-rape campaign launched by NGOs in 2001. It was this disturbing indifference that compelled a woman activist to state that 'a government that doesn't enforce its own laws to protect women from rapists and attackers is an accomplice of the crime' (Panos Ethiopia 2000a, p. 6).

A survey by Kasaye Mulugeta, conducted among high school students in Addis Ababa and its environs reports:

A total of 140 female students were involved in the study. The prevalence of completed rape and attempted rape against female students was 5% and 10% respectively. The age range of those against whom actual rape was committed was between 12 and 13 years, and 85% of the rape victims were less than 18 years of age. Of the total respondents 78% believed that rape was a major problem constraining their educational performance. Among the 72 girls who reported they had been raped, 24% had vaginal discharge ... Social isolation, fear and phobia, hopelessness and suicide attempts were reported in 33%, 19%, 22% 6% of rape cases respectively. It was concluded that the prevalence of sexual violence among high school students is a serious problem. Considering that this data provides only a very small sample of the experiences of female students in Ethiopia, one can imagine the extent of the danger that the society is facing. (Panos Ethiopia 2001, p. 14)

There are also a number of factors categorized as harmful traditional practices affecting women's health. The most prevalent is the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM is socially condoned almost universally and there is no region in the country where the practice does not prevail. There are three major forms of FGM, the first of which is infibulation (or Pharaonic as it is known in Sudan), practised in pastoral and some other lowland communities. That is the most ferocious and brutal. The second variety is excision, which is common in most highland and temperate zones and involves the removal of the 'clitoral hood with or without excision of part or the entire clitoris'. The third type is the clitoridectomy, which involves the 'removal of the clitoris together with partial or total excision of the labia minora' (NCTP 2004, p. 3). In all cases, the most sexually sensitive organ of the woman, the clitoris, is removed, thereby depriving the woman of sexual satisfaction for the rest of her life. FGM is one of the most brutal human rights violations of women. FGM is a pandemic occurring throughout the country; that is, in 1998 72.7% of Ethiopian women had been circumcized.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

High prevalence is found mainly in six of the ten regions including: Afar with over 90%, Harari, Amhara, and Oromiya regions with about 80%, Addis Ababa and Somali regions about 70%. Beni Shangul Gumuz, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) fall in the intermediate group with prevalence rates under 60%. (NCTP 2004, p. 4)

The same study also indicates that 62% of the FGM in Ethiopia is due to clitoridectomy, 19% due to excision and only 3% due to infibulation.

Other forms of VAW include early marriage where the girl child is married off at the age of seven, eight and up to fifteen years. The prevalence of early marriage in Ethiopia is 54.6% (NCTP 2004, p. 10). What is more surprising is that the difference in the prevalence of early marriage between rural and urban areas is not significant at all (56.5% rural and 48.9% urban) in a country whose two successive governments have embarked on a policy of the 'woman question' for 30 years between them. Early marriage literally debilitates the life of the girl child resulting in the discontinuity of the girl's education, thereby permanently depriving her of her capabilities. Early marriage also results in early pregnancy and motherhood, effectively ending her chances of personal endeavour. The direct negative consequence of early marriage on the girl child is what is known as fistula, which involves damage to the internal sexual organs upon child delivery. Child mothers with fistula cannot control the flow of their urine as a result of the damage undergone during delivery. There are more than 9,000 reported cases of fistula in the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital (*The Reporter*, 11 September 2005). Fistula can only be cured by an operation in a fistula hospital. There is only one fistula hospital in the entire country whereas early marriage prevalence is 54.6% nation-wide and a great many of the girl mothers fall victim to fistula.

Abduction and forced marriage by abduction is another violent phenomenon that is widespread in Ethiopia and is often accompanied by extreme violence, including rape, continuous beatings and torture. As the NCTP study (2004, p. 17) states, abduction at the national level in 1998 stood at 69%: furthermore

52 of the 65 ethnic groups in whom the survey was conducted have an MBA [marriage by abduction] occurrence of 50% or above. In six of these ethnic groups (Basketo, Dasenech, Hamar, Koyra, Zeyse and Worji) the occurrence rate is 100%. Five of them are in SNNPR [Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region] while one, Worji, is in Oromiya Regional State. Likewise, the rate is between 90% and 99.5% in thirty ethnic groups. The rural/urban occurrence is reported to be 72% and 59.2% respectively.

Domestic violence in the form of wife-beating is also widely perpetrated against women. Although it is difficult to come up with figures, wife-beating is so common in the country that it has almost become 'norm'. The World Bank (2005, p. 45) report on Ethiopia states that wife-beating is a 'cultural problem'. Wives are beaten for numerous reasons, the most common of which is disobeying the husband. Unquestioned obedience to the husband is preached by the two major religions in the country, Islam and Coptic Orthodox Christianity, and is sanctified by the 'holy men'. The absolute obedience of a wife to the will of her husband has become as religious as any traditional belief.

This state of affairs has a great impact on the lack of assertiveness on the part of Ethiopian women. The process of moulding women to become obedient to their husbands begins with the upbringing of the girl child. From childhood, girls are even taught how to sit and walk, how to eat, drink and talk: 'You are a girl, talk like this and sit like that' is the norm in all Ethiopian communities. In addition, religious ethics are added to make the whole thing holy and sanctified by the dominant religions.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Sexual harassment is a major form of violence against women. This is a common offence perpetrated by young men, employers, bosses and teachers. It is hardly seen as an offence, let alone as violence. A great many women also interpret harassment as a compliment to their looks. However, the borderline between harassment and rape or abduction is so thin that the consequence is debilitating to young women and girls. At Addis Ababa University where the brains of the younger generation are supposedly assembled, the worst forms of sexual harassment take place followed by horrendous forms of violence. In the last six years, more than four girl students at Addis Ababa University have been stabbed to death for refusing to go out with boys who invited them. Liquid acid has been thrown in the faces of few girl students, resulting in permanent damage. Employers and bosses and a great many teachers ask for sex in return for favour in employment and grades.

Ethiopian women are beyond doubt politically disempowered. Although it is true that they are largely excluded from the altars of power in many parts of the world, including some supposedly advanced countries, in Ethiopia disempowerment is absolute. Women are not just politically unrepresented and excluded from decision-making bodies and processes, which is a typical phenomenon in Africa. They have also lost all their political capabilities to advance their cause. Every avenue enjoyed by women in other countries is closed to Ethiopian women. For instance, they have no means of influencing policy-makers so that law enforcement agencies implement the law to defend women from the worst forms of violence unleashed against them. Groups that advocate women's rights are seen as adversaries and with suspicion, and at times are openly threatened. The Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association was banned for a while because they exposed the plight of a young woman who was almost killed by an attacker, a case that embarrassed the Minister of Justice at the time. In 2002, the Oromiya Regional Council passed a bill tacitly recognizing polygamy. NGOs who signed a petition addressing the Oromiya Regional Council, demanding that the decision to be reversed, were openly threatened by the head of the Oromiya regional government. The EPRDF has its own front 'women's organizations' in each region attached to the ruling parties there, and these are the only organizations that are supposed to speak on behalf of women. But the purpose of the EPRDF's organizations is to advance the cause of the party and that prevents them from advocating women's rights. This is a fundamental problem for women in Ethiopia, and as this is a policy followed by the ruling party, it constitutes political exclusion. Precisely because of this structural problem, women are also excluded from the processes that devise the legislation and policies that concern them. From the days of the first enactment of the country's constitution in 1931, when the major laws such as the penal code were implemented, women have been completely excluded.

However, disempowerment will not just go away. Someone has to address the issue. But first a critical mass is needed and social leaders must emerge to take the lead to initiate the process of empowerment. At present, a critical mass has begun to emerge in Ethiopia, mainly through the efforts of the civic sector, NGOs and associations in particular. This process is extremely slow and at times frustrating due to a number of factors, the main one being the hurdles put in the way by the government. In fact, with the ratification of new law on civic associations drafted by the government, the efforts already made by women's leadership and the nascent civil sector will take a severe blow.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

It is also necessary to produce social leaders and activists who can take the struggle for the emancipation of women forward. Leaders and activists who are devoted to the cause and who work hard are sorely needed. South Asia and India in particular are quite lucky in this respect. And that is no accident as the level of space and freedom in India is far better than many other places to the south. Ethiopia in this respect has not yet produced its gender activists and social leaders. The stifling political atmosphere is the main hurdle, although the civic sector also has its own weaknesses. Despite the rhetoric about the 'woman question' that has continued for thirty years, Ethiopia is still some way off from producing its own gender activists.

The treatise on 'freedom as the precondition for development' must go beyond rationalizing the indispensability of freedom and establish the linkages between the various components that make this freedom workable and practical in a given society at a given time. It must identify the principal social agent for development. Beyond the necessity of space for popular participation by civil society, that is freedom, there is also a structural problem at the cultural/ethical level that severely prevents society from having the disposition to accept, absorb and consolidate democratic ideas and alternatives. It is crucial in a discourse on democracy and democratization, with implicit impact on development, to identify these hurdles and get to the bottom of the nature and characteristic features of their construction. It is the identification of these hurdles that can lead to identifying areas of intervention that can make a breakthrough towards changing the perceptions to which Ethiopian society still clings.

Knowledgeability is one important precondition for the transformation of individuals from subject to citizen, thereby laying the foundation for the emergence of civil society. The process of social change/transformation towards civil society and the dismantling of poverty are the key to development. Women constitute the social agency for social development and change towards freedom. Here, we are dealing with another dimension of the problem: namely, how lack of knowledgeability, which is poverty of the mind, in turn perpetuates poverty and under-development. As the Ethiopian variant of the patriarchal mentality unveils itself, male dominance becomes a function of the degradation of women. In addition and, as we have seen in the section dealing with rape and violence against women, Ethiopian women, far from exercising social agency and enjoying recognition of their role in social change, in fact live in perpetual fear, hopelessness and apathy. Their male counterparts bask in the dominance that patriarchy has bestowed on them but at a huge cost – the cost of ignorance. A great many of the womenfolk also share this patriarchal mentality, thus forming another hurdle in the required transformation from subject to citizen.

At this stage, the patriarchal society in Ethiopia, even if it is granted unrestricted freedom for participation and political choice, suffers from serious maladies at the cognitive level, which is in turn one of the major stumbling-blocks to the transformation of subjects into citizens. The universality of ignorance, its pervasiveness and the impact of the low level of cognition on individual Ethiopians constitutes the principal hurdle for democratic and humane values to develop and expand, which in turn influences the development process. The prevailing attitude on sexuality in general, and masculinity and female sexuality in particular, lies at the heart of this cognitive malady. It accounts largely for the generally repressive and under-developed attitude towards the living (women) and the future (children). Unless Ethiopian society passes through some kind of 'cultural

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

revolution' at the level of cognition, democratization and freedom will remain an unrealistic dream, and so will poverty eradication and development. In this sense, women, being both the object and subject of the required change as well as in their responsibility for nurturing the future generation, constitute the principal social agent for development. Without women as principal subjects and gender as the perspective at the centre of a strategy of change and development, neither freedom/ democracy nor development can be attained.

From the reality at grassroots level too, poverty is very much linked to women and in the contemporary world poverty has a woman's face. Successive UNDP Human Development Reports as well as numerous studies have consistently indicated that 70% of the world's poor are women. This holds true for Ethiopia too, where there are more factors that make women poorer. As part of a traditional society of the fiercest patriarchal values, Ethiopian women are primarily responsible for raising and rearing children; they also look after the aged. In male-headed households women have no say in property and the allocation of family income. In pastoral communities, women are not even allowed to own property. In such an impoverished country, the household and the country and the family have managed to co-exist mainly due to the sacrificial role of women. In short, women constitute the proletarians of our time. By the same token, development paradigms and strategies as well as democratization processes cannot do without the central role played by women or without gender as a perspective.

Furthermore, no section of Ethiopian society is as exposed to all forms of violence and discrimination as women are. Violence against women is believed to have been going on for centuries and has now reached alarming proportions. This violence is tantamount to unleashing violence against society itself. One enormous structural constraint on the part of civil society as far as the process of subject-citizen transformation goes is precisely the prevalence of the violent psyche against women. The violence against children also falls into the gender domain.

Moreover, if civil society is that sphere of society located outside the state sphere, the section of society which has always been disempowered and located outside the sphere of state power since time immemorial is women. This alone makes them potentially the most vibrant members of civil society as they 'have nothing to lose but their chains', to use Marx's famous phrase.

However, a significant feature of a civil society is its capacity to engage the state. In the case of women's civic organizations and those working on gender issues, the experience of the EPRDF's attitude towards women is that of restriction. Like all civic organizations, those working on gender are also subject to restrictions and sometimes intimidation. The EPRDF's policy is to dominate all spheres of organized, active social life and it leaves no stone unturned to dominate organizations working on gender issues. It has established phantom 'institutions' in the name of the Women's Affairs Office under the Prime Minister's Office and a number of 'women's associations' under regional governments in Addis Ababa, Amhara, Tigray, Oromiya, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples State (SNNPS) and so on. These 'associations' are appendages of the EPRDF as mass organizations of the vanguard party. They are not independent at all, and cannot be so as they are all set-up and led by EPRDF cadres, follow the party line and implement its policies.

The EPRDF has adopted a strategy to ostracize civic associations by depriving them of donor funds. It does this in a number of ways. First, it makes registration of

civic associations a legal requirement and makes the process of acquiring a certificate of registration almost impossible. Second, it makes it obligatory that donors may only fund those civic associations that are legally registered. To make matters even worse it demands that civic organizations have funds available as an important precondition for registration! While systematically blocking the emergence and function of civic associations the state promotes its own ‘associations’, notably the relief organizations such as the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and the many women’s ‘associations’.

The state, by definition, cannot cover all areas of development. The independent participation of civil society has to become involved if a country is to prosper. This is true even if the state concerned is well informed on gender issues and has a credible policy to emancipate its women. As has been shown, the EPRDF has serious limitations on this score. It has insufficient knowledge of gender and refuses to abandon the old Leninist formula of the ‘woman question’. It follows that it does not have an emancipatory policy either. The consequence is enormous, like other development disciplines that constitute the domains of sustainable development, the EPRDF has created a vacuum by systematically excluding and stifling civic associations without delivering the solutions to the problems of Ethiopian women.

This restrictive policy has serious implications. It has stifled the emergence of independent civic associations (including women’s associations) and NGOs that work on gender issues. This is a severe blow to the cause of women’s emancipation as it robs them of their most important capability to emancipate themselves: *independent participation*. Having followed this stifling policy, the EPRDF has failed to develop its own institutions of governance to the level of a fully-fledged state. A government in power can only attain such institutional development through interaction with and response to independent civic intervention. It is the massive intervention of civic groups that prompts a government to move to its rightful role of regulating rather than controlling and dominating. And it is only such a role that in turn can galvanize the process of deconstructing poverty and under-development.

The TPLF’s orientation on gender – dubbed the ‘woman question’ – is the same as that of all Leninist and Stalinist parties. It is precisely because the ‘woman question’ was not formulated in a thoroughly revolutionary way, but in a way that it would ‘emancipate’ women in the abstract, that the old gender social relationships were not abolished in the first place. How has the EPRDF performed on the ‘woman question’ since it came to power in 1991? Its policy and practice on the ‘woman question’ is a reflection of its two-track policy and its ‘revolutionary democracy’. Track one is a recognition (on paper) of the rights of women, such as in the Ethiopian Constitution and other laws; this includes an engagement in a great deal of showy rhetoric on the rights of Ethiopian women. This rhetoric is designed to catch the attention of Western donors who want to see the inclusion of gender in development activities as well as in macro-policies in general. Using this tactic the EPRDF has successfully deceived Western donors who are apparently impressed by the ‘involvement’ of Ethiopian women in development.

Track two of the ‘woman question’ is the policy that the EPRDF in fact believes in and pursues. The disparity between the rhetoric and practice explains why the condition of Ethiopian women is still one of the most deplorable in the world as shown in the 2004 UNICEF report on Ethiopia. The current state of impoverishment of women and the denial of their rights is as a result of the EPRDF’s macro-economic

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

policy in general, and its specific policy on 'women'. As we have seen above, Ethiopian women are disempowered mainly because they are denied the freedom and space to regain their capabilities. This is exacerbated because of the government's overall policy on freedom dictated by its rhetoric of 'revolutionary democracy'. The lack of freedom and space for society as a whole affects women more than any other sector as gender is related to a number of domains of sustainable development. To discourage the independent association of women it has set up its own women's associations in each region led by the Women's Affairs Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office. As to empowering women, the EPRDF has no vision whatsoever. Instead, its everyday practice infringes on women's freedom and denies them independent association. The few women's organizations outside the EPRDF, like all other NGOs or independent associations, are subjected to close government scrutiny and a multitude of bureaucratic hurdles. One of the reasons why there are so few active women's organizations is precisely this stifling EPRDF policy. Little wonder that there is only one rights-based women's organization in the entire country: the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association. The others are all service-delivery NGOs – the EPRDF naturally has little problem with them. Once freedom has been stifled, the agency of women is also stifled because 'the ability to define one's goals and act upon them' (Kabeer 2000, p. 29) cannot take place without the resource – in this case freedom. The EPRDF does not take the issue of gender seriously.

As has been shown, the record of the EPRDF on women's rights and its role in ending VAW is abysmal. The historical role of a state, since the days of Hammurabi, is to provide justice; and one of the principal missions of the modern state is to protect the security of its people and the rights of the citizen, to ensure that they have equality before the law and that no individual infringes the rights of any other. The EPRDF has, however, been completely apathetic in protecting the rights of women and ending violence against them. It has relatively powerful law enforcement agencies, police and courts, but in protecting the rights of women and dispensing justice in cases of violence against them, the law enforcement agencies have been feeble. As a consequence, there is a huge disparity between the violence perpetrated and the number of reported cases. VAW in Ethiopia effectively deprives women of their agency, their capacity/right to make their own choices both at home and in society. This is the basis of their poverty and the poverty of Ethiopian society. Half the Ethiopian population is denied freedom, and upon them hangs the life of every household. Society can thus neither be free nor prosperous. At the household level, 'VAW can constrain women's choices, limit their productivity, and prevent them from bargaining effectively with their husbands or partners, all of which can undermine the health of these women and their children (Terry 2004, p. 471).

As Amartya Sen says: 'There is nothing more important in the political economy of development than the adequate recognition of women's participation in political, economic, and social leadership' (quoted in Terry 2004, p. 475). And Terry continues: 'By curbing women's agency, in other words limiting the choices women can make, VAW puts a brake on positive social change for whole societies, as well as the women concerned and their families' (2004, p. 475). Undoubtedly, this is the fundamental problem that Ethiopian women face and needless to say, this is the country's fundamental problem. It is to this fundamental problem that the EPRDF policy has remained apathetic.

Environment and sustainable development

In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation. (Rio Declaration, 1992)

Why is the environment in general and conservation of natural resources in particular so important for impoverished and traditional countries such as Ethiopia? First, the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian population, nearly 85%, lives in the rural areas and is engaged in agriculture. Second, the rural population depends on the availability of natural resources to produce crops in the case of peasants, to raise livestock in the case of pastoralists, and to hunt and gather in the case of hunters and gatherers (although the number of the latter group has now dwindled). As Tedla (2003, p. 25) puts it: 'the majority of our people rely completely for their livelihood on what nature provides'. Third, the rural population depends entirely on nature for firewood, energy, construction of shelters and medicines. This dependence on natural resources exposes the livelihood of the country's rural population to the vagaries of nature. The state of nature, such as the climate, determines the availability of natural resources upon which rural people depend. The climate determines the availability of rain, and thus the availability of water. Peasants start panicking when rains are delayed or do not fall, which in turn affects cultivation. Pastoralists also worry when rains are delayed because these farmers have to decide on the pattern of movement of their cattle. Conflict with other pastoral communities may also arise over competition for water and grazing land.

In short, the rural population is dependent on the availability of natural resources and the dynamics involved in the process of accumulation, which in turn determine diversification of livelihoods and so on. Most important, in rural areas the degradation of the environment is detrimental to food security. As Gedion Asfaw writes: 'the availability and sustainable use of environmental resources, to a large extent determine the food security situation of a country' (Asfaw 2003, p. 43). Two things are crucial here: the availability of natural resources, and the sustainable use of these resources. The first is provided by nature while the latter falls within the domain of human action – the ability of people to know about and to put into practice, certain policies in order to use these resources while simultaneously ensuring the continuity of their availability.

A major problem in Ethiopia is the fact that once degradation or destruction of natural resources occurs, recovery is either impossible or extremely difficult. Plants or animals may even become extinct. And in a given ecosystem, of which natural resources are part, the functions of the fauna and flora make them *de facto* interdependent. Some life cycles involve both the flora and fauna, and once these cycles are broken and discontinued, the ecosystem will be affected and become depleted. Preserving the flora and fauna requires a large, expensive undertaking. From this point of view alone, preserving the environment and conserving natural resources saves humanity from the troubles that lie ahead. Because of this crucial role that the environment plays in the lives of humans, we say the environment constitutes the physical domain of sustainable development.

Despite the acute environmental crisis that Ethiopia faces, the country is still endowed with conservable natural resources and is enriched with biodiversity. As Asfaw (2003, p. 46) attests:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The Ethiopian biodiversity is made up of an estimated total of 6,500–7,000 plant species of which 12 are endemic. There are also 277 terrestrial mammals, some 861 bird species, 201 species of reptiles, 63 species of amphibians, 150 species of fish and 324 butterfly species of which 31 mammals, 28 birds, 24 amphibians, 4 fish, 9 reptiles, 7 butterfly species are endemic.

In the face of such biodiversity, however, there has been severe environmental degradation and destruction for several decades that has now threatened the very livelihood of the rural population, which comprises 85% of the population. The rural population has reached a stage where it cannot feed itself, making Ethiopia one of the most food-insecure countries. The state of food insecurity has become so perennial that, for instance, in the face of what is officially labelled as ‘a year of bumper harvest’, the government still requests food aid from donors. For a long time now, and despite the most serious warnings by experts, to which I will return later, Ethiopia has indeed entered a serious environmental crisis, a crisis of no return that has led to a situation of perennial food insecurity. It is in view of the seriousness of this situation that Shibiru Tedla (2003, p. 24) wrote:

If 85% of Ethiopia’s population, which lives in the rural areas and is engaged in farming and cattle breeding, cannot feed itself, we can simply decide that the magnitude of nature of the problem has no indicator and forget the whole thing.

What are Ethiopia’s major environmental problems that have a direct bearing on perpetuating poverty and under-development? And how could the civic sector make a difference if it were allowed to do so? It is important to situate the problem in relation to poverty on the one hand and what civil society organizations could do (given the government’s apathy) on the other hand. This will give definition to the role that freedom is able to play in poverty alleviation.

The single most important environmental problem that aggravates the precarious life of rural Ethiopia is deforestation, which has taken place massively – and continues unchecked. Although the rate of deforestation did indeed increase with the introduction of the Australian eucalyptus tree at the turn of the century from Australia, the problem is not a new one. Crop cultivation disappeared centuries ago from the highlands and mid-highlands because of deforestation and a disregard for conservation of the environment. In Buddhist culture, in contrast, respect for nature plays an important role and has a great impact on food security. In the peasant world of Ethiopia conservation has never been encouraged despite the fact that environmental conservation is a cornerstone of their livelihood. What gives an additional dimension to environmental degradation is the nature of the country’s topography – the highlands and mid-highlands in particular.

The direct impact of deforestation is soil erosion. The roots of trees stabilize the soil and give it a strong base. Deforestation deprives the soil of that particular function and the soil is then exposed to wind and water erosion. Because of the topography of the highlands and mid-highlands,

the water that drains in this manner from every plot of land turns into streams and rivers flowing away with a full load of fertile and rich soil. When the soil is thus washed away by flooding rivers, it is not only the soil that the country loses, but also the microbes that sustain the fertility of the soil. (Tedla 2003, p. 25)

As the population increases in the rural areas, so does the demand for cultivable land, housing and firewood and the scale of deforestation (and soil erosion) increases. What is the extent of deforestation in Ethiopia?

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

It is estimated that the forest coverage of Ethiopia's landmass at the turn of the century was more than 40%. By 1987 it had dwindled to 5.65% according to the Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) estimate (Wood 1990, p. 187). And by 2003 it had shrunk further to a mere 0.2% (Asfaw 2003, p. 44). In addition, 87% of the highlands, where most of the population lives, were previously covered with broad-leaved deciduous and coniferous forests (Wood 1990, p. 187). The destruction of forests must also be examined against the background of population increase. As the demand for additional farm plots, huts, and fuel-wood increased, more trees were felled. In addition to the lifestyle of the peasantry, unchanged for centuries, the government has no programme of awareness-raising for the peasantry on environmental issues that are relevant to their day-to-day lives. All this has meant that deforestation has continued on a massive scale. To this must be added the fact that constant conflicts also result in great destruction of the biodiversity. Warfare, refugees and resettlement programmes all mean that trees are cut down for fuel, huts and cultivation.

The rate of Ethiopia's deforestation is alarming. In 1994, the Ethiopian Forestry Action Plan concluded that the deforestation rate was 150,000 to 200,000 hectares per year. In 1967 high forest coverage was 8.8 million hectares. In 1988 that figure had dwindled to 5.4 million, a loss of 3.4 million hectares in just 21 years, that is, 162,000 hectares per year (Asfaw 2003, p. 44). The situation has become alarming and yet the EPRDF policy is apathetic. One of the last remaining forest regions is Gambela, but even there the picture is not promising. According to Asfaw: 'Future trends for Gambela Region indicate that the region will lose 32% of its high forest in the coming three decades while the estimate for Oromiya is 27% for the same period' (Asfaw 2003, p. 45).

Trees have specific functions in conserving soil. Forests and vegetation also regulate the availability of water in rivers, springs and other water bodies. If the soil loses that capacity, it starts to degrade and fails to retain and regulate the amount of water to be retained in the soil. That results in direct run-offs and the soil begins to erode, as is happening on Ethiopia's highlands and mid-highlands. As Wood (1990, p. 187) puts it:

Erosion is specially severe where slopes have been cleared and when the removal of permanent vegetation from arable land creates runoff and reduced infiltration causes streams to become more intermittent and lower water-tables, both of which increase the time required to collect water in the dry season.

This has been a typical pattern of soil erosion in Ethiopia for several decades now.

Soil erosion also contributes to shrinkage of lakes. Lakes play a crucial role in providing water supplies to towns in Ethiopia and in generating hydroelectric power. A typical feature of the Rift Valley lakes in Ethiopia now is that they are getting drier. Three important lakes in Eastern Ethiopia, which used to supply water to neighbouring towns and farms, have dried up, impacting heavily on people's livelihoods. Lakes Alemaya, Adele and Lange in Harrarghe, eastern Oromiya region, have dried up completely during the last five years. Lake Alemaya used to be the source of water for the historic town of Harrar and other small towns nearby. But for more than two years now Harrar has experienced a severe water crisis. Lakes Koka, Abyata and Awassa are also threatened unless drastic measures are taken immediately. Why are these lakes drying up? Deforestation causes soil erosion, run-offs which carry a huge amount of soil with them then deposit it at the bottom of the lakes. This begins to push the water level upwards causing a false 'flood' of sorts.

The lakes increase in area because of the rising level of the floor. This is a typical symptom of a drying lake. I shall return to this issue when I discuss Lake Awassa in relation to the EPRDF's policy.

Shortage of fuel-wood is another consequence of deforestation and brings a heavy burden to bear on mothers and women in general as they are responsible for fetching water and firewood, both of which are more difficult and time-consuming to come by. The shortage of fuel-wood compels peasants to use dung and crop residues, which now together 'provide up to 55% of domestic energy and are the dominant fuel source for one third of the population' (Wood 1990, pp. 187–188). Then too, burning dung has its own negative consequences for the soil. As Wood says: 'The burning of this source of soil humus has led to a progressive deterioration in soil structure, infiltration capacity, moisture storage, and fertility' (1990, p. 188). It also has an impact on the volume of crop production. All these environmental issues undermine the capacity of crops to withstand drought and so exacerbate variations in crop yields. Burning dung reduces the nation's crop production by an estimated 10 to 20%. The decline in the humus content of the soil causes a further cumulative fall in crop production estimated at 1% per annum and at the rate the deforestation occurs 'by 2020 the last highland forests will have disappeared' (Wood 1990, p. 188). Once the destruction has occurred, rehabilitation becomes impossible in view of the economic conditions of the country. As Wood warned in 1990, 'To meet rural fuel-wood needs in 2010, and replace the use of dung as fuel, some 16 million hectares of rural fuel-wood plantations will be required, with another 1.2 million ha of forests to provide timber needs' (1990, p. 188).

Undoubtedly, soil erosion and land degradation are serious threats to Ethiopia's agriculture, rural livelihood and food security. Several studies on land degradation have been undertaken during the last two decades. In the early 1980s, it was estimated that 3.7% of the highlands (2 million hectares) had been so seriously eroded that it could not support cultivation, while a further 52% had suffered moderate or serious degradation (Wood 1990, p. 188). Wood also indicated that close to 75% of the highlands are estimated to need soil conservation measures if they are to support sustained cultivation. In 1985, the Ethiopian Highland Reclamation Study came to some equally alarming conclusions: 'It concluded that over 14 million ha in the highlands were seriously eroded' and that '1900 million tons of soil were annually eroded from the highlands' (quoted in Asfaw 2003, p. 45). The increase in population in rural Ethiopia (while the way of life and culture of cultivation and agriculture in general endured unchanging) also placed more land under cultivation, implying less land for forests and grazing. In 2000, the Woody Biomass Inventory and Strategic Planning Project produced further disturbing figures on land degradation, with some regions losing upwards of 10 tons of soil per hectare per year (Asfaw 2003, p. 45). Such a massive scale of soil erosion and land degradation is taking place in a country with 85% of its population depending on these increasingly depleted resources for their livelihoods. M. Constable has good reason to conclude that 'the highlands of Ethiopia contain one of the largest ecological degradations in Africa, if not in the world' (quoted in Degefu 1991, p. 21).

In addition to blatant apathy on the part of successive governments in Ethiopia towards environmental degradation – which has contributed in no small way to poverty and under-development – maladministration has also led to political conflicts and armed insurrections. Indeed, warfare and insurrections have continued

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

unabated in the country for the last 500 years. These conflicts have led to resettlement by refugees who fled their original settlements. To mitigate political and 'famine problems', the Derg and EPRDF governments have both ventured into ill-prepared resettlement schemes that have involved the movement of people from areas that are already highly degraded to new, previously uncultivated areas. The refugees arrive at these new areas with their farming culture and attitude towards the environment firmly entrenched and with no security of tenure on the land. Hence the vicious cycle of environmental crisis is precipitated.

Although the major environmental problem that is directly associated with the processes of poverty and under-development is deforestation that results in soil erosion and land degradation, there are also other problems that contribute to environmental degradation. Notable here are the national policies on rural development adopted by successive governments. Such policies have often failed to generate growth in the sector and have led to degeneration of agriculture. Problems of land tenure are crucial and are at the heart of this problem. During the imperial period, land tenure was extremely exploitative and turned the peasant into a pauper who perished when famine hit Wollo and Tigray in 1973. The Derg made land state-owned, but the problem of food insecurity was by no means solved and the country suffered a second major famine, far more serious, in 1984–1985. Subsequently, under the EPRDF, more than 14 million people were in need of food aid in 2002, with a much higher percentage of the population affected by famine, a situation that was even more serious than that of 1984–1985. And yet environmental degradation continues: governments have simply not learnt from the neglect shown by their predecessors!

Another major environmental problem is also policy-related, namely the measures introduced by the various governments on land tenure that constrained the diversification of livelihood systems for the rural poor. This issue will be discussed below in an assessment of the EPRDF's policies.

In 1967, G.C. Last, who was an advisor to the government at the time, issued a warning to Ethiopia's leaders:

As you are probably aware, this is a most serious issue [conservation of natural resources] in Ethiopia. In some ways the problem has already reached crisis proportions with regard to: a) the loss of soil through erosion, b) the destruction of forests, c) the destruction of wildlife, d) the rapid diminution of utilizable water supplies. ... There is sufficient evidence to show that, unless serious steps are taken, not only will desert conditions develop rapidly in various parts of Ethiopia but, important national resources will disappear. ... The question of conservation is usually the subject of a great deal of talk but very little action. It is clear also that really effective measures must be based on a widespread understanding of a spirit of co-operation among the population. (quoted in Asfaw 2003, p. 43)

G.C. Last made this statement not now, not even at the time of the Derg, but 40 years ago! In his capacity as advisor and as a geographer, he wrote this in a memorandum to the vice minister of education on the subject of launching a campaign on the conservation of natural resources. Last was probably the first person to issue a serious warning to the government in office. As we will see, such warnings have emanated from several natural resource management experts as well as environmentalists and are still forthcoming. This is the third government to reside in the imperial palace in Addis Ababa since Last made his statement but the official response has been negligible. As Asfaw (2003, p. 43) says: 'What is striking is [that]

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

almost four decades later we are talking about the same issues and probably the solutions currently being recommended may not be much different from what was recommended then.’ Similar to issues of freedom/democracy, gender and rural development, the scope and content of the discourse on environment has been repeated for the last three to four decades. This provides another dimension to the development discourse in Ethiopia: namely, the issues that determine Ethiopia’s development have not changed over time, largely because of lack of concern. A research project on the failure by government to address these issues is long overdue and must be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

Investigating the performance of the EPRDF on the environment should begin with an examination of the outlook of the ruling party. Starting as a Maoist grouping with a strong Stalinist orientation, the notion of environmental protection and conservation of nature did not exist in the minds of the TPLF leaders. The founder of the TPLF, Aregawi Berehe, confirms this. He blandly admitted during an interview conducted with him that the TPLF had no idea about protecting the environment either at the time of its formation or indeed much later when it overthrew the military government (personal communication, Dec. 2004). Negasso Gidada, the first president of the country under the EPRDF and currently a member of the federal parliament, confirms Aregawi’s assertion. According to Negasso, the EPRDF’s perception did not even change after the Rio Summit that was held in 1992 (personal communication, Jan. 2006). As on gender and democracy, the EPRDF’s rhetoric on the environment seems to emanate from donor funding requirements. As the NGO activist I interviewed explained: ‘the EPRDF’s “concern” for the environment originates from donors’ requirements for development funding. It is only to display that environment is on its agenda’ (personal communication, 2006).

Much to the benefit of the EPRDF in terms of awareness on the environment, one year after it came to power the Rio Summit was held. The EPRDF sent a high-level delegation, led by the then prime minister, Tamrat Layne. Upon their return, a Ministry of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection was established. Apart from the necessity of a viable institution on the environment, laws and policies are also crucial. But very little has been done since. The State of Environment Report for Ethiopia issued by the Environmental Protection Authority in 2003 states that three laws have been enacted on the environment: the proclamation on the Establishment of Environmental Protection (2002), the Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation (2002) and the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation (2002). It is interesting to note that all three measures were issued in the same year.

As in its performance on gender, there are still great gaps in the EPRDF’s perceptions, policies and laws on the environment. These are simply too far off the extremely critical needs of the country in terms of conservation. The gaps relate to institutional arrangements corresponding to the official rhetoric on conservation and environment; the capacity of the existing institutions; the EPRDF’s attitude towards NGOs that are engaged in environmental issues and natural conservation projects; and official neglect.

In 1995, the EPRDF passed Proclamation No. 9/1995 on the basis of which the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) was established as the principal institution to deal with the environment and nature conservation. Although the proclamation is commendable, the relegation of the institution from a ministry to a

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

mere authority (as explained by the NGO activist I interviewed) is a major departure from the initial attitude that prevailed after Rio. The law that led to the establishment of the EPA has, however, flaws – including a lack of clarity on a number of provisions. Its major weakness is the fact that it does not ‘provide the Authority with strong powers required for effective co-ordination and regulation’ (Lemma 2004, 8). Also, unlike ministries, the EPA has no nationwide structure down to the level of wereda to enforce the 1995 law and implement the environmental policy proclaimed in 1997.

Although the 1995 law and the Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE) introduced in 1997 are certainly major breakthroughs, there is still a need for legislation on the debilitation of the environment and poverty eradication. A measure to combat deforestation, for example, is an urgent need because Ethiopia’s most serious environmental crisis emanates from the massive deforestation that has been going on for decades. From an estimated 40% coverage of the landmass at the turn of the century, Ethiopia’s forest coverage has now been reduced to 0.2%. It is therefore no surprise that environmental degradation as a result of deforestation continues on a frightening scale and lakes continue to dry up under the very noses of regional administrations. This contributes directly to widespread drought, famine and poverty.

Ethiopia’s worst record in the area of environmental protection has also been confirmed by well-known environmental institutions such as the UNDP, the Yale Centre for Environmental Law and Policy at Yale University, the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network at Columbia University and Conservation International. In a 2005 report (known as the Environmental Sustainability Index) issued jointly by the Yale Centre for Environmental Stewardship and the Centre for Environmental Law and Policy of Columbia University, Ethiopia ranks at 135, ahead of only nine other countries (Environmental Sustainability Index 2005, p. 22). This record must be seen against the background of Ethiopia as an ecosystem rich with unique flora and fauna found only in this country. Conservation International also confirms that Ethiopia is fast losing its unique biodiversity.

The state of the environment requires ‘a preventive policy and strategy’ as an NGO activist put it (personal communication, Jan. 2006). According to this person, the environmental problem in Ethiopia has reached such a critical point that it is absolutely essential for the authorities to move from therapeutic measures to prophylactic (preventive) ones. Drastic measures have to be taken immediately to conserve the natural resources of the country and protect the environment. Macro-economic policies and rural development policies must take natural conservation as the cornerstone of their strategy. More than 85% of Ethiopia’s population depends on what nature provides.

Obviously, the EPRDF does not want to give space to NGOs in the area of natural conservation, although NGOs are doing a great deal of work in this regard, even in providing short-term training programmes on natural conservation for government staff at the wereda level – as Care Ethiopia does in the Awash valley.

One of the major civic interventions is that of the community in the conservation of nature. In many societies, there are traditional knowledge systems that promote the protection of the environment and have done so for centuries. Various farming communities in Ethiopia also have rich knowledge systems in preserving the

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

environment. Referring to Dessalegn Rahmato's publications that record the best conservation practices of the Konso and Gamo peoples, Getachew and Demele (2000, p. 20) also conclude that:

all these arguments stand in support of the need for the promotion of indigenous environmental management practices and institutionalization of local authority systems (empowerment of local communities accompanied by a scheme to enable them to benefit from surrounding natural resources which used to have been considered as threats in the form of eviction).

Making the public aware of conservation of nature is one crucial intervention. However, the EPRDF's record in this respect is abysmal. In Ethiopia where the rate of illiteracy is high, radio and television can play a decisive role in transmitting information-based knowledge that can be used by rural and urban communities. Basic and elementary information on environmental protection could carry a strong message on conservation. However, as the environment does not really constitute its agenda, the EPRDF has not been engaged in providing such information and awareness.

To support our argument on the prevalence of official neglect of the preservation of the environment, suffice it to mention the alarming situation of lakes along the Rift Valley that are drying up. Lakes Abyata and Shalla are dangerously depleted mainly due to the siphoning-off of water to a soda factory. The case of Lake Alemaya is a classic case of official neglect and the ineptness of the government. Lake Alemaya was one of the largest lakes along the Rift Valley, supplying water to nearby communities including big towns such as Harrar. However, after decades of unchecked build-up of silt, the lake finally dried up completely in 2005. A smaller lake nearby called Adele has long been dry. A third lake along the Addis Ababa–Dire Dawa route, called Lake Lange, not very far from Alemaya, also dried up recently. These are not isolated cases but a clear case of a pattern of environmental change that is proving disastrous to human life and biodiversity.

The impact of the demographic transformation of these lakes is immense. For instance, during the 2002 drought, electricity rationing was introduced in the capital, Addis Ababa. The official explanation attributes the problem to the capacity of the Koka Dam to generate electricity because the water level in Lake Koka has fallen because of the drought. In fact, the problem was not really the low level of water as there had been drought periods previously that had been withstood. The problem was that the silt that was developing beneath the lake had not been dredged for more than 30 years.

Lake Awassa, the second-largest lake in the country, appears to be the next in line to dry up. A 2005 study commissioned by SOS Sahel, a local NGO, and conducted by Delta Consultancy, has produced alarming findings on the current state of the lake and its future. The elevation level of the lake has increased to the extent that enlargement of its surface area is already taking place and on the western portion of the elevation, the difference in the catchment is 5.40 metres. Further, the study finds that:

the surface of Lake Awassa has increased by 1,237 hectares in three and half decades ... The lake's surface area, according to computations from the 2001 satellite photograph, is 9,596 hectares, occupying about 6.5% of the catchment. In three-and-a-half decades, Lake Awassa recorded a horizontal surface increment of 1,237 hectares with per annum expansion of 34.4 hectares. (SOS Sahel 2005, pp. 40, 56)

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The Lake Awassa catchment is one of the most populous regions in Southern Ethiopia. Cultivation has intensified here for the last three decades and has resulted in the clearing of forests. According to the report, in terms of area:

the proportion of cultivated land accounted for 33.0% of the total area in 1965 and increased to 47% in 2001. During the period, the size of land newly converted to cultivation each year amounted close to 680 hectares. However, the tradition of food crop production for the growing population in the area caused damage to 42.0% of the vegetation that existed in 1965. Moreover, the semi-pastoral nature of occupation involving higher per capita livestock holding, put incremental pressure on available vegetation. Meanwhile, in areas west of Lake Awassa, both dense woodlands and open bushy woodlands completely disappeared as a result of simultaneous expansion of cultivation activities and increased encroachment of settlements into the vegetation-rich flatlands. (SOS Sahel 2005, p. 58)

The local people attribute the disappearance of the vegetation in the area to ‘the effect of land fragmentation, particularly in individual farm plots ... average size of farmland per household has been as low as 0.58 hectares’ (SOS Sahel 2005, p. 59). These findings are indeed pointers of the direction in which the current state of environmental degradation is going. Lake Awassa is destined to meet the same fate as Lake Alemaya and others before it – unless something drastic is done to prevent the disaster.

According to Tewolde G. Egziabher, director general of the Environmental Protection Authority, who was interviewed on national television in 2005, the fundamental obstacle to Ethiopia’s environmental problems lies with the ignorance of the successive governments of Ethiopia. He claims that successive governments have meddled in matters about which they have no expertise. Because of their high-handed attitude, he says, they have destroyed the capabilities of the rural population to preserve the environment. This has in turn created a huge gulf between government and the people. Asked what the solution is, Tewolde maintains that the government should ‘listen to what the people have to say’ on the preservation of the environment. He feels that it should merely ‘affirm the role of the people’ and only complement their endeavours with the kind of assistance that the people need. One has only to extend this observation to the government’s approach towards the other domains of sustainable development.

Rural development

The question of rural development is indissolubly linked to the environment. It is a crucial one for Ethiopia because the overwhelming majority of its population lives and works in the rural areas and depends on the natural resources available for their survival. In short, Ethiopian society is predominantly agricultural and is engaged in crop cultivation as in the case of peasants, and livestock production in the case of pastoralists. Both peasants and pastoralists have to work extremely hard to make ends meet. However, both communities have long become captives of government policies on the one hand and of recurrent drought on the other, thereby becoming perpetually food-insecure.

Ethiopia is well-known for its famines and for its many ethnic-based conflicts. Drought does not necessarily lead to famine, but in Ethiopia this is invariably the case. Why is this so? Are the state of rural poverty, food insecurity and the occurrence of famine related to other factors such as freedom, democracy and the process of the emergence of a civil society?

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

There are, broadly speaking, three traditional societies in Ethiopia, each with its distinct mode of production. The peasantry make up the majority, while the pastoralists comprise roughly 15% of the population. The hunters and gatherers, the third economically-defined group, are now very few in number. The peasantry is engaged in small-scale farming, while pastoralists are engaged in livestock production; both (economically speaking) lead a very precarious life. The peasant sector is plagued by sporadic famine and lives in a perpetual situation of food insecurity. On the other hand, until recently (when Sudan took over) Ethiopia had the largest number of cattle per head in Africa. Because of the cultural bias towards pastoralism reflected in macro-economic policies, Ethiopia's livestock wealth has never been seen as a national asset.

Poverty in rural Ethiopia has made the lives of communities precarious. Several factors contribute to this state of affairs, including: macro-economic policies; lack of freedom and democracy; environmental degradation; climate change and so on. Rural development in Ethiopia should be aimed at reversing this trend. It should mean a radical change in the lifestyle of rural communities; it should mean empowering them so that they can disengage themselves from total dependence on nature. Empowerment in this sense connotes a multitude of factors, including putting political structures in place and their being accountable to rural communities; broadening the scope of freedom and democracy; setting up institutions of governance to assume the role of a regulator rather than a ruler; releasing rural communities from the social inertia that inhibits them from participation; empowering women socially and politically; expanding education both formal and civic; and expanding health services. Rural development cannot simply be surplus grain production by the smallholder peasant.

Rural development cannot take place in a vacuum. As pastoral indigenous knowledge system has it, but put in the language of development discourse, there has to be a balance between the use of natural resources and the ecosystem. Imbalance in this relationship causes degradation, which in most cases is irretrievable. Rural population cannot sustain life under continuous degradation and against the background of population increase. Widespread social, political and economic problems and the alarming rate of environmental degradation are daunting issues. Mitigation of the structural problems is an enormous and multidimensional undertaking. What can and should be done?

There are some important components that should feature in a rural development strategy for Ethiopia. A strategy that the country's rural social formation and the historical state of the economy can afford is disengagement of the rural population from the land. What Ethiopia needs is a strategy that enables the rural population to disengage from the land – peasants from the farm plots and pastoralists from perpetual dependence on grazing land and water points. The rural population must be transformed from the situation it has been floundering in for thousands of years to a state of economy characterized by small-scale commodity production, exchange and accumulation. The strategy must enable as many of the rural population as possible to become other types of producers such as petty traders, artisans, carpenters, producers in co-operatives, and so forth. It should not be imagined that this strategy will succeed in isolation from other sectors such as the development of the modern sector. Rural development cannot take place without the simultaneous development of the modern sector.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

What are the structural problems of the Ethiopian peasantry? What makes the life of the peasantry so precarious? The major issues are: 'diminishing farm size and subsistence farming, soil degradation, inadequate and variable rainfall, tenure insecurity, weak agricultural research base and extension system, lack of financial services, imperfect agricultural markets and poor infrastructure' (EEA 2000, p. 178). Some of these factors are within the bounds of control by policy-makers, but others are not; they are nevertheless interwoven because the EPRDF's agricultural policy falls far short of what is required.

One problem is population increase against the background of a situation in which the possibility of expanding the total land area for farming is extremely limited. Ethiopia's population in general and that of the rural population (the overwhelming majority of the poor live in rural areas) has grown tremendously since land reform was introduced by the Derg in 1975. The Ethiopian peasant, in the first place, is unable to invest in a non-farm activity on a long-term basis in order to transform into a petty trader. Second, and worse still, the peasant consumes everything produced, which means the peasant economy is a subsistence economy – there is no surplus grain to store.

Although some degree of non-farm activity exists, a social division of labour has not yet emerged. This has an impact at two levels. First, it has stifled the emergence and development of the market, even in a limited, rural setting. Second, employment for those who want to sell their labour in order to earn a little extra has become impossible as almost no one can afford to hire labour. Another structural problem is soil degradation. Farms and grazing lands in Ethiopia have suffered from massive land degradation. Then too, there is tenure insecurity, which has a great impact on productivity as well as environmental degradation. The issue of land ownership has been controversial since 2000 because the 1975 land reform (which did not give ownership rights to peasants) only gave them user rights to work on the land. Land belongs to the state. The EPRDF has not only affirmed this policy initiated by the Derg, but has also inserted this stipulation into the 1995 constitution, thereby effectively shielding it from public debate. Land ownership is also related to security of tenure which in turn is linked to a number of social, political and environmental relationships.

Tenure security must go hand in hand with the traditional knowledge system, culture and tradition of communities. Ethiopia is a mosaic of diverse ethnic groups, cultures and knowledge systems. In a project involving transformation of rural life that is based primarily on traditional knowledge systems, endorsement of measures taken to transform it must be done by the communities in question. This is essential. The best way to achieve tenure security, whether through land privatization or not, should be defined according to these diverse traditional knowledge systems.

As these categories are strongly based on local indigenous knowledge systems, the recognition of multiple strategies and diversification of the means of livelihood is inevitable. This is essential, as a strategy of rural development must be supported by the rural communities. (Tegegn 2004, p. 48)

Thus, when choosing between security of tenure through land ownership or a land ownership policy, it is required to recognize this diversity. This means, in principle, recognition of the possibility of multiple forms of land tenure. One certainty is that if pastoralism is to flourish in Ethiopia, there can be no private ownership of land. Land is owned by the community at large and its natural resources are also protected by the entire community.

Pastoral life has become precarious particularly since the series of droughts from 1992 onwards. In Afar and Borana (see Alemayehu 1998, pp. 15–16), drought has decimated cattle and livestock. As one pastoral elder recently told me in an interview: ‘Previously people who had up to 2 000 cattle and animals now have no more than eight or ten’ (Tegegn 2005). People chose pastoral livelihood systems because they inhabit a harsh environment unsuitable for cultivation in the first place. In Afar, cultivable land is located along the River Awash and areas adjacent to Wollo. Besides, commercial farmers have already taken the fertile land along the Awash and the government also has a scheme underway to expand sugar plantations over an area of about 7,000 hectares along the Awash. If the Afars move to cultivation *en masse*, there will definitely be a land shortage. In the case of both peasants and pastoralists, rural life has become so precarious that changing to a different livelihood is not only urgent but an absolute necessity.

The knowledge gap on pastoralism in the intellectual world as well as among policy-makers has also left a gap in information on how primitive accumulation can take place from within the pastoral system. As in the farming context, pastoral accumulation can begin with livelihood diversification processes. However, this will require great external support both in terms of legal and policy frameworks in the government as well as other developmental support from stakeholders in pastoral development. This is mainly because the pastoral way of life is under grave threat unless a viable alternative can be found.

Primitive accumulation in the pastoral context and as an economic category needs to be complemented by social and political interventions to make it successful. It must be contextualized within the larger category of pastoral development. Pastoral development must start with affirming the need for social change in this sector and social transformation within the community. The hitherto macro-intervention aimed at settling pastoralists was met with hostility by the community, and this is largely why the endeavour failed. Indeed the record of the EPRDF on agriculture can only be characterized as dismal. A large number of food-insecure communities still exist in the country although the number fluctuates between drought and ‘bumper harvest’ periods. Whether or not there is drought, millions of Ethiopians still depend on food aid. Even when the government claims bumper harvests, a minimum of 2.5 to 3 million people need food aid. Such is the precarious state of Ethiopia’s agriculture. Needless to say, at the centre of this failure is bad governance and ill-advised policy.

It has been almost 17 years since the EPRDF adopted its Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) in order to use rural development as a vehicle for industrialization. The bitter truth is that the country is still stretching out its begging bowl for food aid. Yet the EPRDF still claims that it is on the right track.

Population and development

Population constitutes the demographic dimension of sustainable development. The fact that the issue of population is directly related to social development has not been contested since the UN’s International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. The Cairo conference produced a Plan of Action as a reference for governments and development actors to mitigate problems of poverty and under-development that are directly related to population growth.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The rate of population growth and the fertility rate in Ethiopia is simply frightening given the prevalence of an extreme state of poverty. For an impoverished country like Ethiopia (with a current population of 80 million), to have a population growth rate of 3% per annum and a 5.9 fertility rate, and yet be ranked among the countries with the lowest level of social and economic development, is an extremely serious problem. Between 1900 and 2007, the population rocketed from 11.8 million to 80 million, and the rate of population growth grew from 1% at the turn of this century to its current 3%. Population growth accelerated steadily in the 1960s and leapt ahead from the 1980s and particularly the 1990s, that is, after the EPRDF came to power.

The population trend is characterized not only by high population growth and a high fertility rate but is also accompanied by a high level of infant and child mortality. Although a decline in fertility and infant/child mortality rates has been observed in recent years, the current level is still one of the highest in the world. The third component of the population trend in Ethiopia is the fact that a large part of the population is young. In its 2003/04 Annual Economic Report on Ethiopia, the Economic Association of Ethiopia (EEA), states: 'Of Ethiopia's current population of about 70 million, 4% is estimated to be less than 15 years of age, which implies a high dependency ratio.' And what is the impact of this?

Taking into account the high level of unemployment and underemployment and those economically inactive, an economically active person is forced to carry more than one dependent person. When the national population policy was issued in 1993, there were 116 inactive persons per 100 active ones. (EEA 2004, p. 128)

To add to this, the youth will, within a few years, enter a reproductive life and, even at a much lower fertility rate, will still contribute significantly to population growth. A further characteristic feature of the population trend in Ethiopia is the spatial distribution with a high concentration in rural areas and the highlands.

Indeed, population is indissolubly connected with development. The high rate of population growth in Ethiopia is taking place against a background of a stagnant agriculture that has failed to secure food for its own people. As Sahlu Hailu says:

the performance of the agricultural sector, which employs the vast majority of the population, is lower today than it was 20 years ago. The non-agricultural economy employs a very small proportion of the labour force. Agricultural land is over-crowded, over-cultivated and under-maintained and has lost most of its organic matters, and has been severely eroded. The population pressure exacerbates the situation. As a result, the country is condemned to perpetual food dependency and foreign aid. (Hailu 2004, p. 30)

Poverty and limited services such as education and healthcare constitute a vicious circle along with population growth. The greater the population numbers, the less adequate these services are; and the more the well-being of the people will suffer. A high rate of infant, child and maternal mortality rates prevail and other social indicators such as primary and high school education are correspondingly poor. The Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA) report claims that: 'according to the 1994 census, only 23.4% of the country's population was literate. To date, about 40% and 87% of primary and secondary school age children respectively, are still out of school' (EEA 2004, p. 133). These figures are confirmed by Sahlu Hailu, who contends that a 'little more than a third of school-age children have access to primary education. The rate for girls is only 17%. High school attendance is limited

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

to less than 12% of the age specific group while higher education is limited to less than 2% of the youth' (Hailu 2004, p. 31). Population growth in Ethiopia has also impacted upon other social services such as health care; economic performance in crop agriculture; conflict over the use of resources; and employment opportunities. Other social indicators such as access to proper housing, electricity and potable water, are also abysmal.

Problems generated by population growth or population issues in general cannot be analysed without referring to gender and the social and political milieu surrounding human reproduction. This is starkly clear in Ethiopia, where the very notion of reproductive rights is largely unknown. This ignorance is coupled with government apathy on the matter as well as the predominance of traditional religions such as Orthodox Christianity and Islam. In the rural areas, there has never been any discussion of reproductive rights and women's right to take decisions that concern their own bodies. Childbirth can be an agonizing experience for women, resulting in pain, physical changes to their bodies (even morbidity), and can result in bad health, physical and psychological trauma, often as the result of a lack of maternal care services. Nor do the problems of childbirth end by giving birth. In Ethiopia, the burden of child-rearing is entirely the responsibility of the mother, even in urban areas such as Addis Ababa where most of the country's educated people live.

Respect for the reproductive rights of women is not even recognized by law. The revised edition of the Penal Code, ratified by the parliament in 2003, declined to grant women their reproductive rights. The EPRDF, who claim to be revolutionary and democratic ('revolutionary democracy') and to champion the cause of women, have flatly refused to grant women reproductive rights. Moreover, the EPRDF have not implemented any systematic education on the matter. Unless the reproductive rights of women are respected and acted upon, the problems associated with population growth cannot be solved. That is the only way to restore the capabilities of women so that they can make decisions about their bodies, the very capacity they are deprived of by tradition and religion. After all, it is the woman who is going to carry the baby for nine months and who must be able to decide whether or not she wants it.

Reproductive rights must also be reinforced by education, both formal and civic. Studies indicate that if women are aware of their rights and the social and economic consequences of having many children, they will be empowered because they will decide not to have more children than they feel they can bring up successfully. That is why educated women have comparatively far fewer children. In Ethiopia many people do not seem to be aware of all the consequences of bringing children into the world. In both Christian and Muslim cultures, having children is a matter left to God. It is common to hear such statements like 'God will take care of it' when it comes to having another child. They fail to see the economic and social consequences of having large families which they cannot afford to raise. In the impoverished world of Ethiopia, children have less opportunity to become productive citizens because the infrastructure of social services is too limited to absorb them. Nor is any family planning education conducted in the media (which is dominated by the government), where such information, particularly on television, would be readily accessible to most of the population. It is true to say that the government's neglect of gender has had a significant impact on population growth, and that the core of the problem appears to be the lack of recognition of the reproductive rights of women.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Sustainable development has a generational dimension which concerns children and youth. It does not only concern the current generation, it is also about preparing the political, social and environmental base upon which the livelihood of the future generation depends. Degrading the environment and destroying the ecosystem is fundamental to the future generation. It is also crucial for future generations to nurture a humane and democratically-constructed generation: a generation that considers women to be the equal of men, respects the rights of individuals, recognizes that all people are born equal and should be treated as such; a generation free of ethnic and religious bigotry, and so on. Education, including both formal and civic education, plays a crucial role in this respect. Such education must be free of ideological brainwashing such as that perpetrated by the Stalinist regimes and the EPRDF.

It is also necessary to nurture such a humane and democratic generation from the political perspective. Since the EPRDF has been in power, politics has been ethnicized to the extreme. It is no longer taboo to think in terms of ethnicity and when this is coupled with protest against a regime that operates on the basis of ethnicity, ethnic prejudice may follow. The government has implemented extremely repressive measures and (as was seen in the 2005 post-election period) is not averse to ruthless suppression of dissenting voices. Such actions may exacerbate prejudice and lead to bigotry.

Nurturing a humane generation is not only the duty of a government. Society as a whole and parents and elders in particular, must also share the heavy responsibility. As a traditional society replete with a violent culture that emanated from its peculiar history, child upbringing in Ethiopia does not nurture children to be humane and democratic citizens. Boys and girls are brought up in an entirely different manner. The protection of the interests of the family is dictated entirely by the head of the family, the man. Boys are nurtured as the future guardians of the family and there is a great deal of violent psyche in the process. A great many fathers teach their sons to fight back and win instead of talking through differences and settling them by dialogue. This has an impact on a number of relationships including their relationship with the children of 'others'.

This is reflected in a horrifying practice that has become relatively common in recent years. Men abduct little children from rural towns and bring them to big cities like Addis where they send them out to beg in the streets. Worse still, they sometimes first blind the children with a poisonous thorn. This has been reported in the media, including the government-owned television, which provided graphic descriptions of this dreadful crime. This is surely a reflection of the prevalence of a violent culture in general and a warped attitude towards the children of 'others'.

Another expression of complete disregard for children is rape against the girl child. As we saw earlier, the rate of rape is not only high but also directed specifically against girls. Children of all ages, including infants, are frequently the victims of rape in Ethiopia. This is another indication of prevalence of a violent psyche, specifically against children. As long as she is the daughter of someone else, she may be targeted. The same can be said about child prostitution. It is society that keeps the prostitution business going. To make the business profitable, the most preferred 'product' is sold in the market. The man who goes out to buy this commodity is perhaps a father or brother who has a daughter or sister of the same age. But she is 'somebody else's daughter'.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Like gender, the environment, children's rights and sustainable development in general, population is a terrain that the EPRDF had not traversed prior to its accession to power. It only became aware of its importance (while it was still acting in its capacity as the Transitional Government), in preparing a population policy prior to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo. That was its first acquaintance with the issue, a full three years after it came to power.

Now, after ten years of rule, the EPRDF government has assessed its accomplishments. Because (in all truth) nothing of importance has been achieved, the government (a rare admission by its standards) recognized its faults and admitted to them. What are these areas of neglect? The head of the national Office of Population, Hiruy Mitiku, outlines them:

1. According to the 1993 population policy, a National Population Council would be set up to co-ordinate the overall work of the government on population issues. The National Population Council has not been put into place yet.
2. The National Office of Population, the ad hoc body set up, was not given a legal framework with which to operate in terms of the duties and responsibilities entrusted to it by the policy framework. Consequently, it was enfeebled from the start in performing its co-ordinating and executing roles. It was not empowered to mobilize resources and inputs at the desired level.
3. At regional level the coordinating role of Regional Offices of Population was either non-existent or inefficient. Inefficiencies were witnessed during the implementation process in those Regional Offices of Population that were handicapped due to a shortage of qualified staff, material, and counterpart budget. The low status accorded to the Offices of Population in some regions through restructuring or otherwise is a distressing situation we live with. Some Regional Offices of Population were relegated to departments or units within other regional sector bureaus, with diminishing roles, unlike those envisaged in the population policy document.
4. The technical capacities of implementing agencies in programme and project formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation are so low that they have to be resuscitated at all levels. A four-year project, for example, has taken a full two years to formulate.
5. There is a tendency to consider 'population' as an independent sector, not as an integral part of broader society. This perception reigned in the minds of some professional cadres who failed to see the nexus between population and development. This led to difficult and uncertain sequencing of activities.
6. It has been observed that 'although gender dimensions of population issues are widely recognized and gender disparities constitute a source of concern, there is not much evidence of gender mainstreaming' in programmes and projects.
7. There is limited involvement of civil society in the implementation of the national population programmes and projects.
8. Co-ordination between agencies responsible for the implementation of the national population policy is weak. The National Office of Population, which was responsible for overall co-ordination as indicated in the policy document, was not given full legal backing to undertake a co-ordinating role. The same can be said of Regional Offices of Population.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

9. There was insufficient interaction between federal and regional offices both laterally and vertically. (Mitiku 2004, pp. 22–23)

In a nutshell, the EPRDF has no agenda on population growth. Suffice it to allude to the testimony of a Western diplomat who said that she thought the EPRDF did not even want to control population growth, and that ‘a population growth rate of 3% and economic growth rate of 2.5% means no growth’ (personal communication, diplomat from the Donor’s Assistance Group, February 2006).

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to bring out the major development challenges Ethiopia faces that I argue are detrimental to the state of poverty and under-development. Policies at the macro-economic level, i.e. government measures on these issues are so crucial that they can determine the direction of the struggle against poverty and under-development. Good policies that emanate from good governance can galvanize the effort to beat poverty while bad policies that normally emanate from bad governance can lead a country to stray. The EPRDF’s government is doing just that.

Notes on contributor

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A retrospective observation of Elias Sime

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Elias Sime is one of the most prolific living contemporary artists in Ethiopia. Elias' works have been exhibited in such major international art events as the 2004 Dak'Art Biennale; 'Green Flame' in the 'New Crowned Hope Festival' directed by Peter Sellars; 'Flow' curated by Christine Kim at the Studio Museum of Harlem; and 'The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End' curated by Alisa LaGamma at the Metropolitan Museum New York. In 2009 'Elias Sime: Retrospective, 1990 to present' will be curated by Peter Sellars and Meskerem Assegued at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in Los Angeles. His wooden chairs will be the stage furniture for the opera *Oedipus Rex* with the LA Philharmonic Orchestra in the Walt Disney Concert Hall. This article is a pictorial analysis of the artist's work and life with detailed descriptions of selected pieces.

Elias often says that new ideas evolve in the midst of work, particularly when he is trying to solve problems. Born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Elias Sime grew up in Chirqos, a tight-knit neighbourhood at the heart of an open market and near a railroad station. Chirqos is named after the St Chirqos Coptic Orthodox Church that is adjacent to the market. St Chirqos is an Amharic or Ge'ez pronunciation for St Kyriacos, a biblical child martyr from Syria.

As a child, Elias enjoyed making his own toys using whatever materials he could find. In both elementary and high school, his science teachers always selected him to draw body organs or other anatomical representations on the blackboard. With support from his father, Elias joined the Addis Ababa School of Fine Art and Design¹ and graduated in 1990 with a graphic design diploma. He often says that his father's assistance gave him the confidence to pursue his career as an artist. It also encouraged him to explore and experiment with new ideas and media. According to him:

growing up in Chirqos, in the middle of the open market, was very influential for my artistic development. When the merchants leave the market at the end of the day, they leave their trash all over the ground. For me, this was the most exciting part of the day. I collected anything I found interesting and made art with it.²

Most of the inspiration for his early compositions evolved from everyday marketplace activities. *Doro Tera*³ (Figure 1) is a depiction of the traditional way of selling chickens and eggs in baskets. All the materials he used in his art were collected from the market.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 1. *Doro Tera*, 50 × 75cm.

Elias always enjoyed pushing limits in the art school. For his graduate composition, he researched the Orthodox Church *seatat*.⁴ Due to the late evening and early morning chill, the clergymen wear *bernos*⁵ and *gabi*⁶ to keep warm. He made a collage for his first draft using *bernos* for black tones, *gabi* for white tones and *sendedo*⁷ for a third, yellowish tone. He was convinced that if he applied all the academic rules of art, using just black and white without defining each body part with specific lines, he would be able to honestly express his observations of the movements and feelings of the *seatat*. He knew that his work incorporated all the criteria of graphic art, even though only black and white were used. He believed that using only these two colours made his art more true to graphic art. As Elias put it:

Most graphic art pieces made in the art school consisted of densely packed lines and a variety of colours. This technique made the pieces resemble realistic paintings with shadows and depth. I was not interested in making my pieces look like paintings. My aim was to create contrast using only black and white.

When his collage draft was not accepted for his graduate project, he presented two standard woodcuts, one in black and white and the other using multiple colours (see Figures 2 and 3), to satisfy the more conservative, rigid academic norm.

Soon after graduating from the art school, Elias abandoned graphic art and began experimenting with collages and wood sculptures. A few of the pieces he made in the early 1990s were combinations of oil paint and collage. Some of his sculptures also had paint in them. Over the years, he collected all kinds of odd objects including tattered cloth, plastic bags, small toys, bottle caps, rusted cans, animal bones, yarn, and buttons. He uses this collection extensively in his art. However, he was



Figure 2. *Seatat Collage*, 30 × 60cm (1989).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 3. *Seatat Graphic*, 34 × 54cm (1990).

concerned that if he did not include some paint in his pieces, they would be rejected as works of art. The piece entitled *Godana*⁸ is the last piece where Elias combined collage and paint. *Godana* (Figure 4) is a realistic depiction of plastic homes built by homeless people who come to the city from rural Ethiopia in search of a better future. These plastic homes were built close together to create a temporary communal neighbourhood. Until recently, they were found in great numbers throughout the city.

Elias graduated from the art school a year before the Derg was overthrown. The Derg era was a period of Stalinist style socialism/communism. During the 17 years of Derg rule, most of the graduates from the art school were given scholarships to study art in Russia or other Eastern Bloc countries. These scholarships were awarded by the respective countries as political diplomacy. There, they mastered techniques of drawing, painting, graphic art, and sculpting. Many of these students returned to Ethiopia with master's degrees and became teachers at the art school. Naturally, they taught what they had learnt – typical socialist realism art. Consequently, most of their students were used as government instruments to promote the Derg's version of socialism and communism. Most of the works produced during these years were realistic paintings of the working class, peasants, melancholy portraits, beggars, and street children. Elias is a product of this training and was a student during the last four years of the Derg. Students were subject to considerable scrutiny by the state. Some administrators and instructors were sympathetic to the budding revolution while others quietly did what the government mandated while waiting for the Derg to lose control of the government. Anyone who dared challenge the system risked

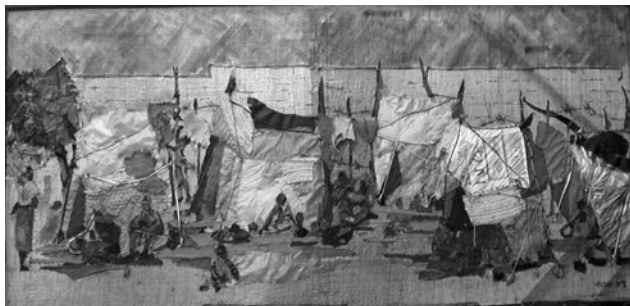


Figure 4. *Godana*, 83 × 173cm (1991).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

prison, torture or even death. Elias was one of the students required to produce signs and banners with slogans such as *Ethiopia Tikdem!* (Forward Ethiopia!); *Abyotawi Enat Ager Woyem Mot!* (Revolution in our Motherland or Death!); *Arengwade Zemecha Byeaktachaw!* (Green Revolution in Every Direction!); *Ke-Guad Likemember Mengestu Hailemariam gar wedefit!* (Move Forward with Comrade Chairman Mengestu Hailemariam!) and *Marxism Leninism Memeriachen new!* (Marxism and Leninism are our Principles!) in graphic lettering. 'I had no choice', says Elias. 'I did not like having to write the slogans but it was clear that if I refused, I would face jail or death.'

In 1984, Elias took the art school entrance exam and failed. At the time, the competition to enter the art school was very tight. Every year about 800 students applied and only 25 were accepted. Determined to gain entry, he continued taking art lessons in the evenings and earned a certificate. In 1986, he took the art school entrance exam again and this time he passed. While he was a student in the night school, he was drafted into the Ethiopian army. At the time, young men were being sent to the frontlines to fight rebels in the north. He passed his medical exam and was cleared to go but managed to escape by hiding in his older sister's house in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Every day, he travelled the long route to the art school and completed the course without ever being found out. He was one of the few young men to survive the draft.

In 1991, a year after Elias graduated, the Derg was overthrown by the government currently in office. For some of the artists, particularly those with no involvement in politics, there was a sigh of relief. The new government did not involve itself in the arts. In this environment, artists like Elias thrived and freely developed their creativity. When I began curating in Ethiopia in 1998, the idea of curating as a profession was very new. Journalists and art admirers would often ask what it was that a curator did!

Elias' artistic progression can be divided into two distinct periods: 1990–2000, and from 2001 to the present. His early works are in a certain sense an extension of the art school and the country's socialist ideology. His realistic portraits depict a melancholy and destitute working class, prostitutes, beggars, and street dwellers. The materials used for his collages were carefully selected for particular compositions. In the 1991 collage *Ocholoni Shach*⁹ (Figure 5), a young boy is depicted selling peanuts



Figure 5. *Ocholoni Shach*, 35 × 55cm (1991).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

from a brown bag. His jacket is a collage of old and tattered blue kaki fabric taken from a standard uniform worn by all government employees whose salary was above 500 birr a month (US\$ 250).¹⁰ Elias's father, a road construction foreman, wore this same uniform. Elias recalls:

At the time I made this art, the Derg was gone and young people throughout the country were confused, yet hopeful for a peaceful existence. Many of them had lost family members during the Derg regime, and their future had been filled with fear. My brother was imprisoned and whipped on the soles of his feet. After he returned, he was unable to walk for a long time. I added the blue line as a symbol of peace. This work is the first piece in which I combined oil paint and collage. In the portrait, I tried to capture the expression of the many youths I observed throughout the country. Their faces were sad and dreamy, but hopeful.

From 1992 onwards, Elias totally abandoned the use of paint in his art. The country was still in a state of panic and his depiction of the people's emotions continued. In the piece titled *Enat ena Lij*,¹¹ a mother is holding and breastfeeding her child. She looks as if she is in a dream world, completely disengaged from her child. The depiction of mother and child in art is an ancient concept. Early civilizations throughout the world have made images of mothers breastfeeding children, using a wide range of media. The Egyptian Isis and Horus; the Indian Devi with a child; Ashanti wooden dolls; and biblical depictions of Mary and Jesus are a few examples. In Elias' collage, the mother's clothing is tattered and patched in many places, indicating her economic status. On the wall are old newspaper cuttings and a needle with red thread. A large number of Ethiopian city dwellers live in homes made of mud and straw with corrugated iron roofs. Their walls are often covered with newspaper. Among other household goods, a needle and thread is an important item because people with lower incomes often have to mend their tattered clothes. A needle and thread is often found in the pockets of both male and female Ethiopian labourers. The idea of continually mending life, an important philosophical aspect of humanity, is thus symbolized. The piece *Enat ena Lij* (Figure 6) is about the state of lower-class living conditions in contemporary Addis Ababa. Because of the dynamic of his neighbourhood, Elias's upbringing was closely connected with the lower classes. His in-depth understanding and keen observation of his environment are evident in his art.



Figure 6. *Enat ena Lij*, 94 × 134cm (1992).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Homelessness is a subject that Elias focused on between 1993 and 1996. He is drawn more to the creative ingenuity of the street dwellers than to their misery. Their pride and self-confidence is what he depicts in these compositions. *Yezaf Bet*¹² (Figure 7) is based on a tree house built by homeless youths. Under the tree is a large dumpster. On the outside of the container, a homeless youth has written: *Kemimeleketew Wuchi Megbat Weyem metegat Kilkil New* (No Trespassing for Unauthorized Personnel) and *Qoshasha Kaltefa Aleweledem* (If Trash is not Eliminated, I Refuse to be Born). Elias says that homeless people living on the streets have hopes and needs similar to everyone else's. 'The difference', he says, 'is that they are living on the streets and trying to protect what they believe is theirs. The language they use to protect their property is the same as everyone else's. I find these expressions intriguing and artistic.'

Elias' artistic media began to change between 1996 and 1997. This was the year he went to Debre Tabor¹³ in Gondor to visit his then girlfriend and returned broken-hearted because the relationship had ended. He then stitched two compositions using yarn collected from the streets. They are strikingly different from all his previous pieces. They are realistic, seen from an open market in Debre Tabor. In *Debre Tabor Gebeya 1*¹⁴ (Figure 8), all of the subjects' including the donkeys' heads are turned down and their faces are undefined. In *Debre Tabor Gebeya 2* (Figure 9), the only subjects whose faces are well-defined are the woman standing in the middle, wearing a cross and the man to her left, wearing the same colour headscarf. He is looking at her, seemingly confused, with wide surprised eyes. The thread and yarn for this piece was collected from the Debre Tabor open market, his girlfriend's house and the Cherqos open market. This is one example of Elias' art in which the media is fully integrated into the composition. After he broke up with his girlfriend, he spent an endless amount of time in his studio making art. Elias went to Debre Tabor filled with excitement and was shocked at his girlfriend's cold reception. Although the



Figure 7. *Yezaf Bet*, 60 × 112cm (1996).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 8. *Debre Tabor Gebeya 1*, 89 × 129cm (1996).



Figure 9. *Debre Tabor Gebeya 2*, 71 × 148cm (1996).

market was colourful and full of life, he was unable to express this in his works because of his feelings at the time. He felt that there was no one to remedy his distressed mood. 'It was as if there was no elder to mediate between us. These pieces are expressions of exactly how I felt at the time.'

After the *Debre Tabor Gebeya* pieces were completed, a large part of the Cherqos open market mysteriously burned down. The fire damaged a number of houses. After this tragedy, as people repaired what was left of their homes, they replaced their ceilings. Elias found the earthy brown colour and historical value of the discarded ceiling cloths interesting, so he collected them. Applying a stitching technique similar to *Debre Tabor Gebeya 1* and 2, he used old ceiling fabric as the background for his compositions. He says:

Fabric ceilings are found in most low-income neighbourhoods throughout Ethiopia. These ceilings are cheap imitations of the ceilings in European-style villas. The fabric ceilings I collected are coloured dark brown from many years of accumulated smoke, dust, and oil from the food cooked in these houses. Their roofs are usually corrugated iron. *Yediro Suk*¹⁵ [Figure 10] is about the small kiosks found in my neighbourhood and throughout the city. These kiosks used to be made from wood. The owners were all from the Gurage ethnic group. Each one was named after the owner, such as *Chemsu Suk*, *Dender Suk* or *Bedru Suk*. These names eventually became the identities of specific neighbourhoods. As time went by, I watched these wooden Suks disappear one by one. Nowadays, many of the kiosks are no longer owned by the Gurages and they are not constructed with wood. Another thing that used to amaze me was the owners' business strategies. Usually, these Suks were owned by more than one person. I used to see the same person working in different Suks at different times.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 10. *Yediro Suk*, 64 × 70cm (1996).

*Babur*¹⁶ (Figure 11) is another interesting piece from this series. Elias says:

It is about a personal experience. My best friend lived with his family behind the railroad station. Throughout the neighbourhood, there was a rumour that the railroad station was going to close. I was very worried about the well-being of my friend's family and many other people around me whose lives depended on the jobs they had at the railroad station. *Babur* is a portrait of a train. I made the stitches on the back of the canvas so that the front is seen with the frayed ends of the threads. The old ceiling fabric serves as a background. The vibrant colours and reversed stitches are expressions of my deep anger. Nowadays, as the city is changing, the trains are falling into disuse. These pieces are the story of my neighbourhood.

*Aqtacha*¹⁷ (Figure 12) is another important piece in the ceiling fabric series. It depicts his quest for stability. 'The central point', he says, 'is the essence of life. When I made this piece, I was emotionally disturbed, wishing to find some stability. Achieving financial or material goals is not difficult; but gaining emotional stability

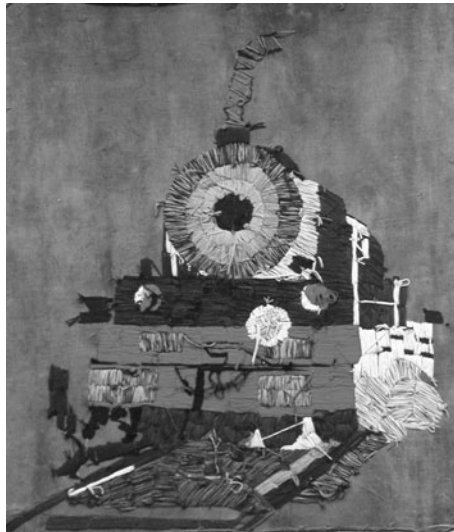


Figure 11. *Babur*, 60 × 71cm (1996).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

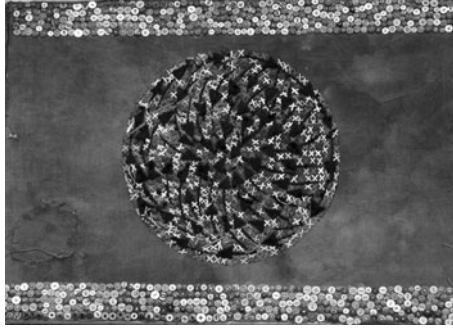


Figure 12. *Aqtacha*, 50 × 70cm (1997).

is a challenge. This work is about where I wanted to be'. After he recovered from this disappointment, he continued documenting observations of his neighbourhood using the old fabric ceilings.

In 1995, Elias began including buttons in his art. 'One day', he says,

I noticed the buttons I had removed from a tattered piece of cloth. I began collecting the buttons from the cloth I was working with. Later, as I was looking at a pile of the buttons I had collected, I began to think up images. That is when I decided to incorporate them into my art.

The piece *Tset*¹⁸ (Figure 13) is Elias's self-portrait. He made it in 1989 while he was working through the break-up with his girlfriend. 'I was painfully upset and often spent whole days in my studio, making one piece of art after another in silence. The material I used for making *Tset* were *masesha*,¹⁹ old burlap, threads, and buttons.' *Masesha* is a cloth that is crumpled up and used to clean the surface of a large clay hotplate used for cooking *injera*, a traditional Ethiopian flatbread.



Figure 13. *Tset*, 40 × 70cm (1998).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

At the time, I was working in isolation. I saw the *masesha* as a symbol of starting over since it is used to prepare the surface for a new creation. *Tset* is the last piece I had to make before I could fully recover.

From 1998 onwards, Elias produced several abstract pieces using only buttons. His subject matter shifted back from his personal emotions to his concerns about social and environmental issues. *Tefer 1*²⁰ (Figure 14) and *Tefer 2* (Figure 15) are about the endless circle of life. *Tefer 1* depicts how all living things run around the circle of life doing different things in search of food. *Tefer 2* is about how all creatures on earth, regardless of their differences, receive the gift of nature equally. Elias explains: 'It is

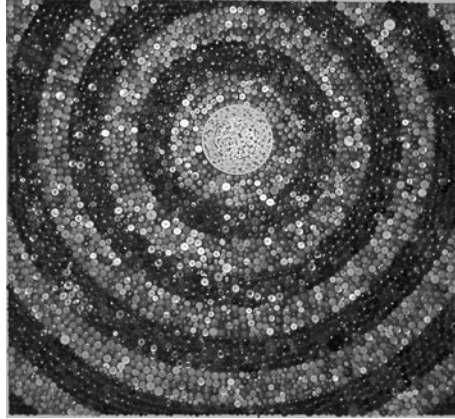


Figure 14. *Tefer 1*, 200 × 200cm (1999).



Figure 15. *Tefer 2*, 150 × 200cm (1999).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

about the repetition of birth, life and death. The different buttons are representative of the diversity of all living things'. In 2000, Elias made *Yemegnot Alem*²¹ (Figure 16). He says:

There are times when I imagine a world without a moon and sun. *Yemegnot Alem* depicts a place where rules and regulations as we know them do not apply, a world with unconditional and unrealistic beauty and love. This is the world I want to be part of ... [which is why] I enjoy using old buttons. As I touch each one of them, I can imagine the person who wore it. The only time I use new buttons is for tone.

In 2001, Elias contacted me and asked me to visit his studio. I was stunned to see the amount of work he had done and the diversity of his creativity. At the time, I was the curator and co-director of ArtSpace.²² Elias had observed my activities over the years and wanted me to hold an exhibition of his work. After seeing a large portion of his work, I told him that I was overwhelmed and did not think that a simple exhibition was going to do it justice. I wanted him to be patient until I found the best way to expose his work. He said, 'Listen, I have waited almost eight years to show my work to anyone so I think I can wait another ten.' I promised to do my best. That was the beginning of our relationship.

In 2002, I curated Elias's first retrospective exhibition at Zoma Contemporary Art Centre in Jara Park.²³ This exhibition was part of Giziawi #1, a three day live public art activity that I organized with artists from Ethiopia and abroad in a large tent in Meskel Square.²⁴ It included visual art, music and dance. Forty-five local and international artists participated. Five international and ten Ethiopian artists worked in the tent while the others showed their work throughout the city. One of the international artists, David Hammons, postponed his trip to Ethiopia to the following year, so Elias took his place. At the same time, he had a solo exhibition in Jara Park, where he showed 76 canvases and 40 wood sculptures. Most of the wood pieces were carved from old traditional farm tools and household items like mortar and pestle, and *gono*, a traditional beer container made with hollowed wood.



Figure 16. *Yemegnot Alem*, 164 × 190cm.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

About eighteen years ago, I went to Bonga, a coffee-growing area in the Kefa region of southern Ethiopia with my father who was in the field for road construction. There, I saw large *gonos* standing outside several homes. Almost all of them had small, visible holes as a result of many years of use. The way they were standing and the holes on them made them look like portraits. I started collecting them and carved them into more definitive faces. I remember how the people were impressed by my interest in buying what they thought were useless for anything but firewood.

For eight years, from 1994 to 2001, Elias sculpted small wood pieces and sold them regularly to support himself and his family. Some of the wood pieces in the Jara Park exhibition were leftovers from the ones he had sold in that time (see Figures 17, 18 and 19).



Figure 17. *Portrait* (1994).



Figure 18. *Portrait* (1995).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

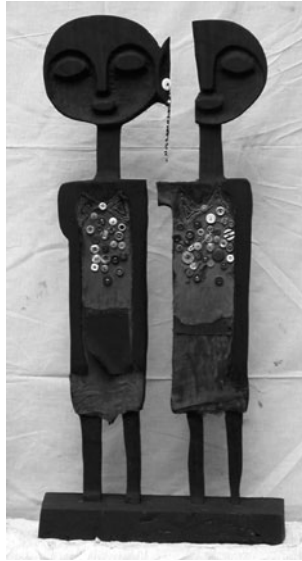


Figure 19. *Portrait* (1996).

Since 1998, I have travelled with artists to many parts of Ethiopia, particularly the south, to research and write about ancient religious rituals that are still practised today. My aim has been to document the rituals with writing and photography while the artist documents them artistically. In 2003, Elias and I travelled to south-central Ethiopia where we documented the stories and ritual ceremonies of the Gurage thunder deity Bojje. After two years of travelling to and from the ritual site, we exhibited *Min Neber?* an anthropological contemporary art at the Italian Cultural Institute. 'I was surprised and confused to see that what I had heard about the ritual was real', says Elias. This exhibition included Elias's canvases, wood sculptures, and large bags of collected material he used to make his art. *Min Neber?* (What was it?) depicts a dying ritual that needs to be recorded while it is still alive.

In the two years it took us to prepare *Min Neber?* other major art events took place. Among the highlights was the selection of Elias's work for the May 2004 Dak'Art Biennale and the surprising performance art he created in December 2004 at the art school during the week-long live exhibition at *Addis Abeba Zare*. During *Addis Abeba Zare*, Elias spent the week mixing mud and straw in the middle of the art school gallery floor. At the end of the exhibition, he came to the gallery dressed in a suit and tie and leather dress shoes and walked into the mud and straw mixture. He slowly talked about the difference between mud and straw and how the mixture becomes strong enough to make a house to last over a hundred years. He also talked about how everything he was wearing came from the same place the mud and straw had come from and calmly sat down in the mud mixture. He explained how one's expensive suit has nothing to do with one's sense of humanity. Under the suit we are all similar. Finally, he took off his shoes and walked out barefoot leaving his footsteps on the ground. This exhibition, which was different from anything he had done before, left us all astounded. This was a turning point in Elias's artistic career, breaking the labels and boundaries

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 20. Elias' performance art at *Addis Abeba Zare* (2004).

imposed upon him. He is neither a collage artist nor a sculptor – he is simply an artist (see Figure 20).

In 2005, I curated *Min Neber?* and put together the photographic video installation. In this exhibition, Elias showed the intensity and unlimited creativity of his art. The stitches on the canvases were smaller than the ones he made in his previous exhibitions, and new media such as bottle caps were incorporated in the stitches on the canvases. *Halafinet*²⁵ (Figure 21) is made with bottle caps and stitches. It depicts a barefoot young girl standing in the dirt, carrying a baby that is most probably her brother, on her back in the late afternoon, looking into the sunset. Elias says:

When I saw the young girls carrying babies on their backs in Gurage, I was reminded of something I had noticed throughout Ethiopia – mostly in the countryside, and at times in lower-income neighbourhoods of the cities. At a very young age, girls are burdened with the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings as they watch



Figure 21. *Halafinet*, 90 × 115cm (2003).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

their friends play or go to school. On *Halafinet*, I made the skirt transparent because I felt as if I was seeing through the child's inner feelings. In most families, any child who exhibits a sign of responsibility is asked to take on more. These young girls reminded me of my own life. After my father's death about eight years ago, I became the caregiver for my immediate family. This was both a burden and a blessing. I often wonder if parents really know what kind of pressure they impose on their children when they give them tasks beyond their level of maturity. In most cases, children who are burdened with this type of responsibility have little time to care for themselves.

The field research in Gurage was full of surprises. We never thought that communities in this day and age were worshipping thunder, forests, and water to that extent. People were either travelling long distances to celebrate the yearly ceremonies of Bojje, the thunder ritual, or sending offerings from as far away as Saudi Arabia and Europe. Every time we thought we were beginning to understand, another surprise was unravelled. Elias named these three pieces *Felega 9*, *1* and *2* (Figures 22, 23 and 24). In Amharic,²⁶ *Felega* means searching. In *Felega 9*, the string

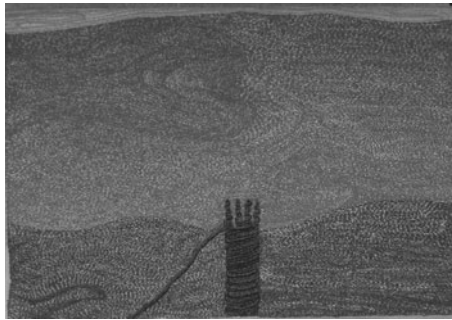


Figure 22. *Felega 9*, 73 × 50cm (2004).



Figure 23. *Felega 1*, 70 × 84cm (2004).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 24. *Felega 2*, 70 × 80cm (2004).

is beginning to unravel, exposing the mystery of the altar. The four wooden spikes pointing upwards are altars erected in front of the entrances of many traditional temples in the villages in the mountains of Gurage. The four spikes symbolize the four teats of a cow, a sacred animal in many ancient belief systems. 'Being there and observing this was like a dream', says Elias. 'The space seemed surreal. I did not know what to make of my feelings.' In *Felega 1*, the right hand emerging from the waves of stitches barely touches the altar with its pointing finger, as if touching a delicate object. Similarly, in *Felega 2*, the hand is barely unveiling the waves of stitches. Elias comments:

I just could not stop stitching. I was overwhelmed by how little I knew about my own culture. I was very excited. I felt like a baby learning how to walk for the first time. I made the waves with small stitches because that was exactly how I felt about the whole experience in Gurage. More importantly, everything I was seeing was confronting my own belief systems and values about what was right and wrong. The small stitches were an attempt at expressing the difficulties encountered and the tenacity it takes to research and document the rituals. I was not able to express enough of my deeply-felt emotions about what I experienced in the field. To this day, I have not finished expressing the boiling ideas in my head. In these works I imagined the mountains we climbed, the number of rivers we crossed, the good and bad people we met, and the endless conversations we had with the villagers and the ritual leaders in an attempt to understand the meanings behind the belief system. The mythologies, the ceremonies and the loyalty and sacrifices made by the worshippers touched me and that is what I tried to express in my art.

The large wooden chairs, doors, and wall pieces were Elias's interpretation of the mythology he was listening to as the elders spoke during my interviews. The chair with the ibex horn and cow's skull with the horns and cowry shells were based on *Jemot*, the first mythological mother who came out of the water with the men who worked for her. This chair has two significant parts. The front part with the feet placed straight is *Jemot* as a leader; the part at the back, with the feet facing in opposite directions depicts *Jemot* as sexual being and the birth-giving mother. With this chair, Elias was able to incorporate the mythology of *Jemot* (Figure 25) in its entirety.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 25. *Jemot*, 201 × 63cm (2003–2004).

Most of the pillars in the temples we visited were made from pine trees. The pillars inside the female temples had four circles carved in relief in the centre. These circles appeared to be symbols of the cow's udder. In most of his wood pieces, Elias incorporated these circles. About *Enat 5* (Figure 26), the door with sixty-six breasts, Elias says: 'If I had more space, I would have made more. I ran out of space before I was done carving them. I felt as if I had found my mother, who died when I was very young.' *Bojje* (Figure 27) incorporates most of the symbolic items used during the ritual. The man in red is the high priest of *Bojje*. Elias comments:

The sticks inserted horizontally symbolize the ritual sticks used by the high priest and the worshippers. The blue stitches behind the priest represent sky and water. The vertical sticks are made from farm tools. The wood I used to frame the high priest is split in half from a rectangular water trough used for sheep. I brought the bowl and the sticks from the ritual site. I will leave the rest of the interpretation to the reader.

He continues:

I love carving wood because it keeps me physically active. I cut the wood and sculpt while listening to loud music, singing along, dancing, and sweating. The stitching and sewing is tedious and at times boring. I am usually quiet when I stitch or make collages. Every now and then, when I need to release pent-up energy, I carve.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

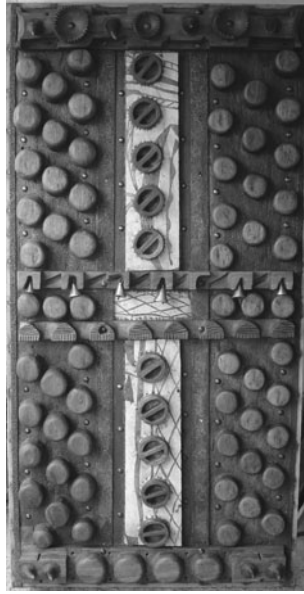


Figure 26. *Enat 5*, 200 × 90cm (2003-2004).

In May 2006, Elias stunned his audience with *Gota Teret-Teret*, the second anthropological contemporary art exhibition about a traditional grain silo made of mud and straw. *Gota* is the name of the grain silos found in northern Ethiopia around the Blue Nile River. This exhibition was based on anthropological research we did in Baher Dar, Gojam. *Teret-teret* is what storytellers say before they begin a narrative. In concept and use, it is similar to the phrase 'once upon a time'. For this exhibition, Elias created ten gotas and eighteen stitched canvases. Each work was

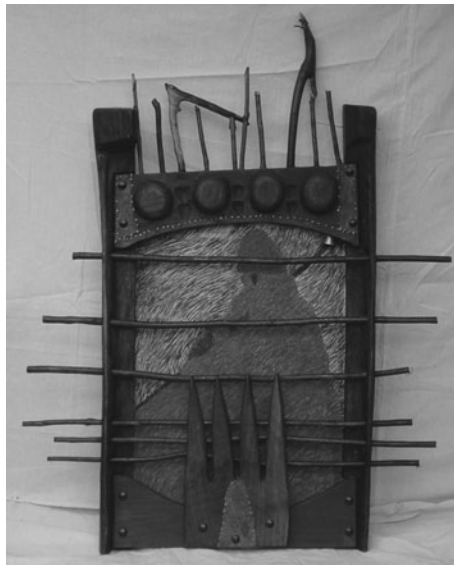


Figure 27. *Bojje*, 93 × 126cm (2003-2004).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

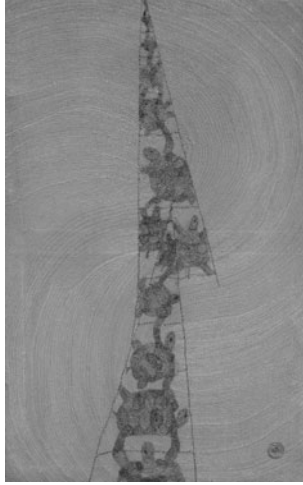


Figure 28. *Elli 2* (Tortoise 2) 68 × 108cm (2005).

composed to reflect the current state of his environment using ancient techniques of sculpting with mud and straw. This time, the stitches were even smaller and more precise than the ones he showed at *Min Neber?*

Elli 2 (Figure 28) is a piece depicting a tortoise going up a ladder and *Elli 3* (Figure 29) a tortoise flying with wings, dominating the canvases. There was also a piece showing ants on a long canvas, where the stitches extended all the way to the floor for the audience to step on. Elias says:

I used tortoises because they take their time to get from one place to another. Their soft bodies are covered with a large, heavy shell to protect them. I used them as symbol of being able to patiently but determinately get from one place to another. By putting wings on them and making them fly, I used them as a symbol for accomplishing the impossible.

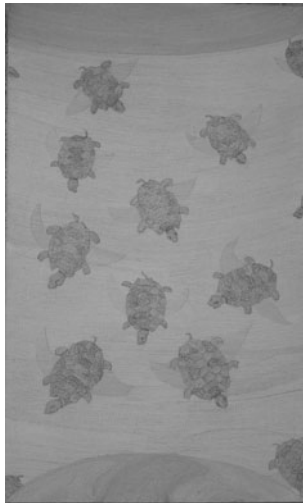


Figure 29. *Elli 3* (Tortoise 3) (2005).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 30. *Gota Dance* (2006).



Figure 31. *Gota Teret-Teret* (2006).

One of the gotas that stood out the most was the one with hundreds of frogs, monkeys and televisions coming out of the holes and scrambling to exit a closed door. Only one of each kind was able to escape. I curated this exhibition with a live mud dance at the opening. I also included two short films about the tradition of making gotas. Elias' modern house, constructed from mud and straw, was also shown. (See Figures 30 and 31.)

That same year in April, the European Union ambassador, Tim Clarke, commissioned me to create a piece of art reflecting partnership between Europe and Ethiopia. I proposed the idea of a public sculpture involving indigenous Ethiopian insects going through metamorphosis. The location was easily accessible for public viewing. Elias loved the idea of the project and made a mosaic along a divider on a centrally-located boulevard in Addis Ababa. The mosaic consisted of sculptures of caterpillars, butterflies, a baby tortoise breaking out of its shell, porcupines, a Nile crocodile, and a frog eating a fly. This mosaic became controversial. Some people thought that the caterpillar was a python and associated it with the biblical story of the python in the story of Eve and the tree of knowledge. Some individuals even tried to put a halt to the construction. In an attempt to ease the tension, we started distributing small flyers explaining the life-cycle of a caterpillar and the fact that all the mosaic creatures were indigenous to Ethiopia. Finally, the mayor of Addis Ababa, Ato Brehene Deressa, came to see me and Elias a day before the opening to learn directly from us about the mosaic. When he gave a speech at the opening, he talked about the unfounded nature of the controversy and offered to do all he could to protect the mosaic from any damage. The mosaic, named *Metamorphosis*

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 32. *Metamorphosis* (2006).



Figure 33. Elias Sime constructing *gota* for *Green Flame* in Vienna (2006).

(Figure 32), is now a landmark in Addis Ababa. It is also another example of Elias's ability to utilize a variety of media in his art.

In November 2006 I was invited by Peter Sellars to be the visual art curator of the New Crowned Hope Festival in Vienna, Austria. The festival was sponsored by the city of Vienna to celebrate Mozart's 250th birthday. I named the exhibition *Green Flame* and invited Elias, Julie Mehretu, Mulatu Astatke, Albert Chimedza with his Gonanombe Mbira band, and Ernest Novelo with Reinaldo and Sergio Pech. For *Green Flame*, Elias made three gotas from start to finish in one month. During this exhibition, at least once a week, Elias sculpted the gotas while dressed in brightly coloured, matching suits with a fedora and leather shoes (see Figure 33). In addition to the gotas, there were canvases made with stitches, buttons, bottle caps and fabric collages.

In April 2008, four stitched pieces from *Min Neber*, *Gota Teret-Teret* and *Green Flame* were shown in *Flow*, a group exhibition in the Studio Museum in New York. I also curated Elias's third anthropological contemporary art exhibition, *What is Love?* held at Alliance Ethio-Francais. This exhibition focused on goats and *selechas*, traditional grain, milk, butter or honey storage sacks made from goatskin. A *selecha* was once seen as an essential household item, but they are now scarce. It took Elias over a year to collect 115 *selechas* from all over the country. One of the difficulties of collecting them was the owners' reluctance to give them to someone they did not know. There is a strong belief that giving away a *selecha* brings hardship to the family. *What is Love?* was an exhibition that questioned love in its historical and

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 34. Mother goat with four kids (2005).

emotional context. Goats in early societies such as in Egypt were symbols of sexuality. The image I used for the exhibition flyer was a photograph I took of a mother goat feeding her own two kids and two others who had lost their mother (Figure 34). I took the photo in Gurage when Elias and I were out doing fieldwork.

Elias comments:

The idea of using *selechas* as a medium came when I first saw a new *selecha* lying on the ground, for sale at a sheep market. It lay with open arms and legs as if waiting for someone to hug. This gave me a warm, happy feeling of love and I could not stop thinking about it so I went out looking for *selechas*.

The idea of associating goats with love took us to different parts of the country. We learned that goats are considered to be some of the smartest animals. Traditional medicine men followed them to learn about medicinal plants. We were told that when stung by a poisonous snake, the goat goes immediately to a certain type of leaf and eats it. This plant gets rid of the poison and helps the goat recover. According to legend, the stimulating effects of coffee were first identified by goats. Because they eat numerous medicinal plants, their milk, meat and blood are considered to have important nutritional and medicinal value. We were also told that Ethiopian children who grow up eating goat meat are healthier than those who do not.

Elias's years of experience and maturity, in both his composition and technique, is clearly demonstrated in *What is Love?* 17 (Figure 35). This piece is full of contrasting colours. The goats are there but are not easy to see. Elias says:

The feet, facing in opposite directions, are mismatched. It is about the confusion of falling in love with someone who is not easily accessible. I find the man-made restrictions of who and what to love absurd. The restrictions are there to confuse what is very natural.

What is Love? 8 (Figure 36) depicts a venus flytrap and the colourful buttons represent different types of insects. About this piece, Elias says: 'I have always been impressed by the venus flytrap. It reminds me of many relationships. It is about being attracted to something very beautiful but fatal.' The precision of the stitching on *What is Love?* 3 (Figure 37) is very impressive. The piece depicts a landscape all in shades of blue. Elias comments:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT



Figure 35. *What is Love? 17*, 95 × 158cm (2007-2008).

The heart is considered to be the universal symbol of love, but different societies have other symbols. In some parts of Ethiopia, for instance, love is symbolized by the lemon. If we take it further, symbols can be created by individuals. For example when two lovers are playing with a certain item, let's say a blue scarf, this might well trigger their memory when they are not together, so it can be a symbol for them. This piece is a love symbol that I created.

What is Love? 1 (Figure 38) is a mountain of turtles exploding. Once again, Elias is expanding his ideas of turtles that he introduced in *Gota Teret-Teret*. He says: 'I

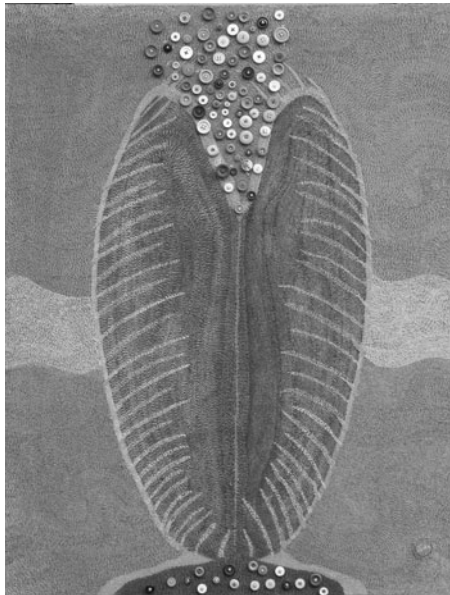


Figure 36. *What is Love? 8*, 75 × 96cm (2007–2008).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

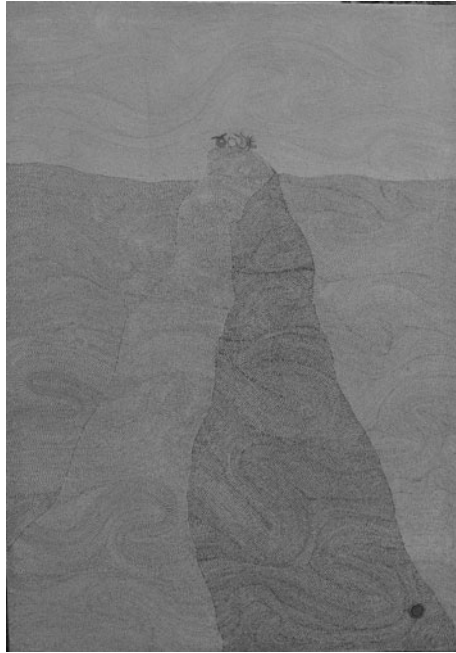


Figure 37. *What is Love? 3*, 105 × 150cm (2008).

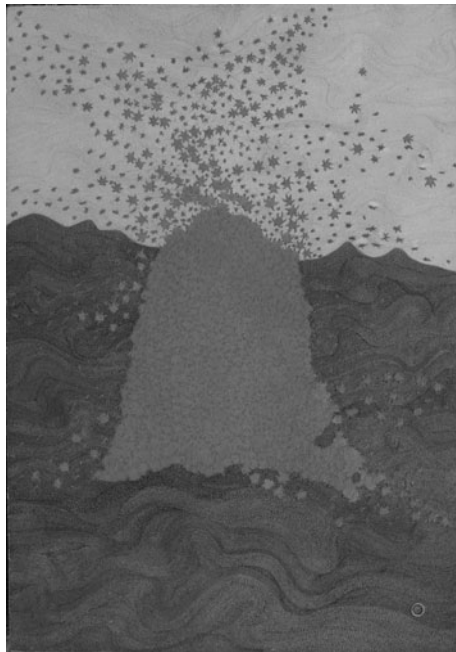


Figure 38. *What is Love? 1*, 132 × 199cm (2008).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

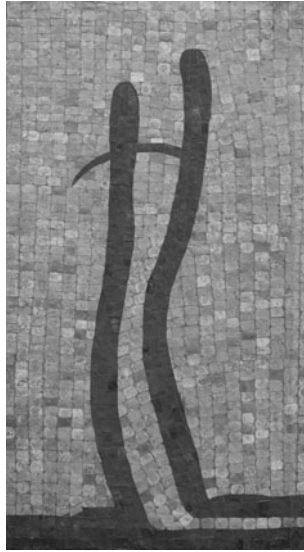


Figure 39. *What is Love? 21*, 67 × 118.5cm (2008).

always use turtles to express patience. In this piece, I used turtles to express a long awaited patience exploding like volcano.'

In addition to the stitches, there are collages made from bottle caps. For this collage, *What is Love? 21* (Figure 39), Elias uses the undersides of the bottle caps flattened and cut into squares. The brown colour is made from rusted bottle caps. Of it, he says:

This piece is about couples who lightly touch one another when they are all alone. They like each other but can't express their emotions because they are bound by fear of the unknown and their ideals of right and wrong.

The installation of 115 *selechas* was the major part of the exhibition. Each one of the *selechas* was carefully stitched to express individuality (see Figure 40). They filled up the exhibition hall, giving the viewers enough room to go around them, smell them and touch them with care. The thought behind this was that the *selechas* were meant to express all kinds of human emotions and the need to touch. Elias says: 'A



Figure 40. *Selecha* from *What is love?* (2007–2008).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

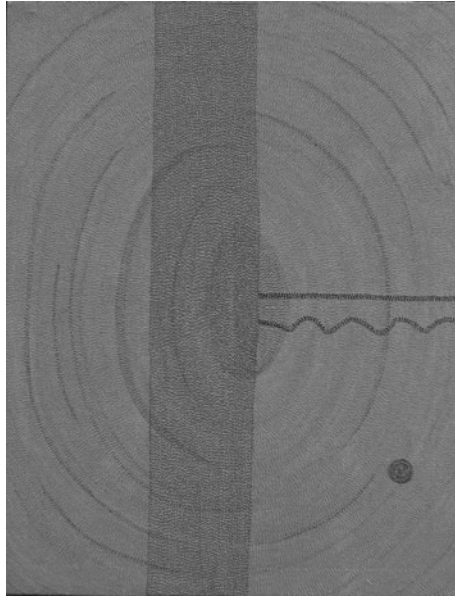


Figure 41. *What is Love? 5*, 75 × 97cm (2008).

Selecha is made from the skin of a goat, representing the human body. It is one body touching another. I used the different languages of love with colours, lines and forms – each one telling its own story.'

One of the highlights of *What is Love?* was the surprise visit to Addis Ababa of Peter Sellars and his assistance in curating the exhibition. In January 2009 I will curate a retrospective exhibition with Peter Sellars at the Santa Monica Museum. In

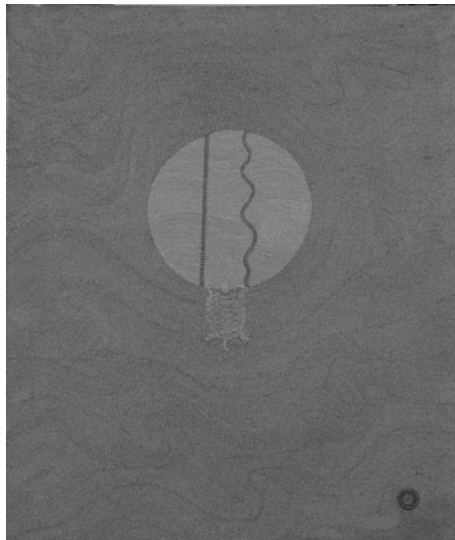


Figure 42. *What is Love? 6*, 82.5 × 96cm (2008).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

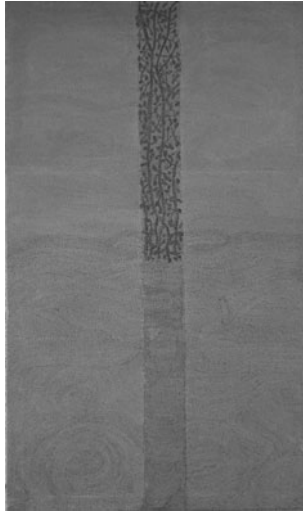


Figure 43. *Fertility*, 93 × 155cm (2005).



Figure 44. Elias's house (2008).

addition, the chairs from *Min Neber?* will be the stage furniture for Peter Sellars' production of the opera *Oedipus Rex*, to be performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra in Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. In September 2008 *What is Love?* 5, 6 and *Fertility* (Figures 41, 42 and 43) will be exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum in New York as part of 'Design Without End' – an exhibition curated by Alisa LaGamma.

Currently, Elias is in the process of building a house that combines modern and ancient construction techniques: using mud and straw, stones, wood, ceramic, bricks, sand and cement (Figure 44). The house is both a sculpture and a home.

Notes

1. In 2005, the art school was annexed by the Addis Ababa University, so its current name is the Addis Ababa University School of Fine Art and Design.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

2. All quotes are from interviews with Elias Sime conducted by the author.
3. Chicken market
4. Matins are prayers performed by clergymen of the Orthodox Church after midnight until dawn.
5. A black woollen cloak worn in central Ethiopia by noblemen or clergymen.
6. White cotton blanket, hand-spun and woven from raw cotton.
7. Special straw for making baskets.
8. Street.
9. Peanut vendor.
10. During the Derg era, the exchange rate for US \$1 was 2 Ethiopian birr but now (in 2008) it is 9.50 birr.
11. Mother and child.
12. Tree house.
13. *Debre* means mountain so the town is named after Mount Tabor, which is not very far from Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile.
14. Market.
15. Old kiosk.
16. Train.
17. Direction.
18. Silence.
19. A bundle of cloth used for cleaning the ceramic pan for making *injera*, a traditional flat staple bread made from small grains called *teff*.
20. Universe.
21. Imaginary world.
22. A gallery and art activity centre that used different venues to exhibit and conduct art related workshops. It was founded and directed by Yassar Bagersh and Meskerem Assegued. Ethiopian Airlines and the Sheraton Addis sponsored many of the events. The focus of ArtSpace was to travel around the world, bringing art to Ethiopia and exhibiting it in the Sheraton ballroom and lobby.
23. A private park where Zoma Contemporary Art Centre was located from 2003 to 2005.
24. The largest and the most active open public venues in Addis Ababa.
25. Responsibility.
26. The national language of Ethiopia.

Notes on contributor

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Situated neoliberalism and urban crisis in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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The implosion of the socialist military government in 1991 ushered in a 'new' period in Ethiopia. This article examines the reincorporation of the country into the sphere of neoliberalism after a hiatus of 17 years of socialist experimentation accompanied by a social engineering project which brought unprecedented misfortune in the modern history of the country. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which assumed power, adopted market-oriented structural and institutional reforms as a condition of getting an infusion of transnational capital and credit to resituate the Ethiopian economy which had been stagnant throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Two arguments are advanced in this article. First, the neoliberal project in Ethiopia which began in 1992 by privatizing the economy, devaluing the currency, reducing the fiscal deficit and abolishing state monopolies and price controls as a condition of the country's entry to the global system has been ineffective in addressing the structural problems facing the country. Second, these neoliberal programmes are exacerbating the existing problems facing the residents of Addis Ababa.

Introduction

Indeed, neoliberal capitalism since 1970 has multiplied Dickens's notorious slum of Tom-all-Alone's in *Bleak House* by exponential powers. Residents of slums, while only 6% of the city populations of the developed countries constitute a staggering 78.2% of urbanites in the least developed countries; this equals fully a third of the global urban population... According to UN-HABITAT, the world's highest percentage of slum-dwellers is in Ethiopia (an astonishing 99.4% of the urban population). (Davis 2006, p. 3)

A good number of those travelers who make brief stopovers in Addis Ababa might leave the city with the impression that it is a very busy metropolis like most other major cities of the world packed with high-rise buildings, tarred roads, world-class hotels and beautiful shops and restaurants. For many of the visitors that spend days and weeks moving round the various residential areas of the city, on the other hand, *Addis Ababa is nothing but a gigantic slum interspersed with modern high-rise buildings and a few affluent neighborhoods*. (Mulugate and McLeod 2004, p.10; emphasis mine)

It would have been better if the government had killed us rather than destroy our homes. They have violated our rights as people as citizens of Ethiopia.¹

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

The above vignettes provide a glimpse of Addis Ababa as a particular city whose structural features and urban problems reflect broadly the condition as the country began to adopt 'market-oriented' neoliberal policies. This article explores the transformation that has taken place in Ethiopia in general, and Addis Ababa in particular, since the beginning of 1991 when the country became reincorporated into the sphere of neoliberalism which ended both the military dictatorship and utopian aspirations in favour of what Jean and John Comaroff (2000, p. 292) have suggested to be 'the exuberance of innovative occult practices and money magic'. The first part of the article provides a brief background on neoliberalism as a specific strategy to expand market relations and reduce the role of the state. Against this background, the second part of the article argues that the neoliberalism project in Ethiopia refers to the particular way the country's economy was restructured in order to accelerate the market orientation of the economy. As part of the condition for accepting the infusion of transnational capital and credit, the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF),² adopted a structural adjustment programme to open the economy and accelerate its integration into the global economic system. The final section considers urban crises of Addis Ababa whose structural features have been exacerbated by the neoliberal policies of the EPRDF government.

Neoliberalism: a brief overview

The policy of neoliberalism can be traced to the late 1960s and early 1970s as a particular strategic response to the crisis of Keynesianism. Drawing on intellectual roots, traceable to the early post-World War II writings of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and galvanized by crucial events crisis of the early 1970s, neoliberal doctrine was:

deployed to justify, among other projects, the deregulation of the state control over major industries, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the shrinking or privatization of public services, the dismantling of welfare programs, the enhancement of international capital mobility, the intensification of interlocality competition, and the criminalization of the poor. (Brenner and Theodore 2002, p. 3)

For the last two decades, a major component of scholarly analysis has focused on understanding the collapse of the Keynesian model and the subsequent restructuring of the global economy under neoliberal imperatives. Although popularized in the influential writings of Friedrich Hayek (1944) and Milton Friedman (1962), neoliberalism has morphed and mutated beyond their intellectual contributions, gaining popularity amongst conservative governments and economists, particularly in Britain and the United States as an alternative to the Keynesian paradigm of high mass employment and mass consumption.

A major feature of contemporary economic, social and cultural life in the world in general and Africa in particular has been the accelerating integration of their economics into the expanding global economic system. The specificity of this integration is mediated by large transnational corporations that are protected and supported by a series of international and intergovernmental institutions that regulate finance and trade of the world economy, principally through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These entities, along with transnational corporations, have

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

and continue to structure the political economy of the developing countries as Harris and Seid (2000, p. 8) have argued through:

- Pressuring the governments of the developing countries into removing their former restrictions on foreign investments, eliminating subsidies that previously protected their domestic industries against foreign competition and opening up their economics to the transnational corporations;
- Using loans, investments, purchasing agreements, patent controls and licensing, by which the transnational capitalist corporations have gained dominance over the most important economic sectors such as agro-export, mining, petroleum, natural gas, tourism, telecommunication, pharmaceutical, advertising and the production of many basic consumer goods in most developing countries.

The major policy instruments used by the IMF and the World Bank have been economic stabilization – the purview of the IMF, and structural adjustment programmes which are the responsibility of the World Bank. Both of these policy instruments are widely used to set ‘policy conditionality’ whereby developing countries must accept specific and mandated ‘reform packages’ (both financial and institutional) to obtain loans from either institutions. These ‘policy conditionalities’ include the following (Harris and Seid 2000, p. 9):

- Removing restrictions on foreign investment so that local industries and banks in the developing countries are no longer favored or protected against foreign companies;
- Reorienting the economies toward exports so that they can earn the foreign exchange needed to service their foreign debt and participate more in the global economy;
- Reducing wages so that the exports of the developing countries are more ‘competitive’ in the global economy;
- Reducing government spending on health, education and welfare so that in combination with wage reduction, these developing countries can control inflation and ensure that all available funds are channeled into increasing the production for exports and paying off their debts;
- Reducing tariffs, quotas and other trade restrictions on imports so that their economies can be integrated more into the global economy and can buy more imports from transnational corporations;
- Devaluing local currencies against ‘hard currencies’ such as the US dollar so that their exports are more ‘competitive’, and foreign investors in these countries can easily transfer their profits into hard currencies and invest them elsewhere;
- Privatizing state enterprises and public utilities so that foreign and local capitalists are given access to investment in and/or control of these entities;
- Deregulating their economies to free export producers, imports and foreign investors in these countries from government controls that protect labor, domestic industries, the environment and their natural resources.

Both the IMF and World Bank provide financial assistance to governments in the developing countries on the condition that they undertake certain fiscal and monetary policies. For example, the IMF’s ‘policy of conditionality’ is clearly stated in the fund’s publications:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

In providing financial support to any country, the IMF must be assured that the member is pursuing policies that will ameliorate or eliminate its external payments problem. Use of the IMF's general resources must be in accordance with the provisions of the IMF's Articles and the policies adopted under them. Consequently, *the IMF usually approves financial support on the condition that the member make an explicit commitment to a set of policy measures* [emphasis added] aimed at correcting its economic and financial imbalances within a reasonable period of time. This requirement, known as conditionality, seeks to strike an appropriate balance between the provision of financing and policy changes. (IMF 1993, pp. 13–15)

Typically, the two institutions along with country authorities design a three-year policy framework, known as a Policy Framework Paper (PFP) that sets the agenda for macroeconomic adjustment and structural reforms. The core objectives of the reforms are as follows (IMF 1997):

- To raise saving rates – private saving is promoted through the establishment of positive real interest rates and financial reform. This effort, however, has proven to be complex and time-consuming. The other and quicker option to improve the national savings rate is by increasing public savings.
- To secure macro-economic stability – volatility in inflation rates is considered to be disruptive and a deterrent to investment. Programs aim to reduce inflation to low levels (single-digit) by reducing the budget deficit, which is a chronic source of financial instability. Since most poor countries cannot afford to cut overall public expenditure, emphasis is put on increasing tax revenues. Low inflation is also considered an important factor in improving living conditions for the poorest sectors of the population.
- To liberalize and open economies to foreign trade – the economies of most adjusting countries have generally been inward-oriented with distorted internal relative prices. Producers enjoy substantial protection from external competition and disincentives against export activity. Programs seek to eliminate systemic anti-export bias through removal of trade restrictions (particularly quantitative import restrictions), real devaluation, exchange rate unification, tariff reform, and liberalization of export price and marketing regimes.
- To reduce government intervention and promote private sector development – a major objective of adjustment is to significantly reduce the functions of the state, particularly in production and in finance. The state is to cease controlling prices, foreign exchange, and product marketing and for the most part to withdraw from ownership and control of the means of production. The goal is to limit its functions to establishing a legal and institutional framework conducive to private business where contracts could be enforced, property protected, and free competition is promoted. Government is also to develop a financial system that serves the private sector by mobilizing savings and channeling them to sound investments.
- To reorient government spending and restructure revenues – in several instances, an excessive portion of government spending is devoted to subsidies for consumer and state-owned firms, wages for inefficient civil servants, ill-chosen projects, and the military. Programs aim to reorient spending from areas with relatively low social and economic rates of return to activities with high rates of return, such as primary education and basic health care. Revenue systems to finance these expenditures are to be rendered more efficient through the simplification of tax and tariff structures, a move toward modern

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

tax instruments such as the value-added tax (VAT), and more effective tax and customs administration.

- To mobilize external resources – a key part of the adjustment program is to support countries' reform efforts by temporarily easing the external financing constraint and to move them toward viability in part through reducing reliance on debt-creating inflows and, in some cases, debt burdens. Policies to this end include the clearance of payments arrears, agreements on debt rescheduling and debt relief, a shift to more concessional financing, and a rebuilding of official reserves.

In addition to these objectives, the World Bank in recent years has gradually expanded its involvement in policy reform to include measures that address poverty. Consequently, the Bank has expanded its lending in primary education, health care, nutrition, small-scale enterprises, water supply and waste management as well as urban development.³

Concerted efforts to restructure the economies of sub-Saharan Africa began to gather momentum in the 1980s at the moment when the continent began to experience mounting debt, high unemployment, escalating urban and rural poverty, widening inequality, balance of payment deficits and declining flow of foreign investment. The World Bank (1981) published its first major response to the economic crisis facing sub-Saharan African countries by publishing its famous Berg Report (*Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*), which attributed economic stagnation in the continent to poor government policies rather than external factors. The Berg Report recommended returning to an outward-oriented programme of raw materials exports, to be accomplished by rolling back state intervention and freeing up market forces to avert impending economic disaster on the continent. Specific recommendations promoted under the rubric of structural adjustment programmes included eliminating state subsidies and controls (on imports, wages, and prices), devaluing local currencies, and letting the market determine the prices for raw materials exports. The discourse around which the Berg Report's micro-economic policy recommendation was rooted is a distinct ideological and programmatic policy often referred to as neoliberalism – a set of beliefs, doctrines and policies favouring the dominance of transnational capital in the globalization of market relations.

Structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa

Since the beginning of 1980s, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a wave of structural adjustment programmes sponsored by the IMF and the World Bank. The first phase of neoliberal reform which was a mixture of ad hoc responses to the specific financial difficulties of particular governments, rapidly evolved into more comprehensive programmes of action and recommendations across the continent. By 1984 many sub-Saharan African countries and the World Bank had signed a total of 84 structural adjustment loans (Van der Geest 1994, p.189) which for the first time shifted the moral economy of African governments by redrawing the state's responsibility. Although structural adjustment policies in sub-Saharan Africa have changed over time, the following prescriptions have endured (Green 1998, p.211):

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

- The imposition of upper limits on fiscal, foreign account and demand/supply imbalances, to bring them into line with sustainable resource flows and thereby restore macro-economic stability;
- The imposition of lower limits on output growth in an effort to ensure that the reduction of imbalances was consistent with rising personal consumption, enterprise investment and the provision of basic public services and infrastructure;
- The implementation of a core set of liberalization policies that entailed the removal of obstacles to efficient markets and the reduction of state ownership, arbitrary intervention and bureaucratic delay. Targets of such policies included exchange rates, interest rates, price controls, single channel marketing and external trade licensing;
- The restructuring of governments so that they engage more efficiently in fewer activities, especially provision of basic services and infrastructure; and
- The promotion of socio-political sustainability through efforts to eradicate poverty, provision of minimal emergency social safety-nets and awareness of ecological concerns, such as erosion, pollution, deforestation and desertification.

Since the early 1990s the neoliberal agenda of the IMF and World Bank began to emphasize good governance and management in the liberalization of the market. Most of the intellectual influences for this approach came from the rational choice model literature as well as new management theories of administrative reform. Rather than reduce the role of the state in the liberalization of the market, the new emphasis sought to establish a new kind of state in Africa which could undertake

public sector reform programmes, capacity-building programmes, information management programmes and a range of training programmes including the following policy mechanisms: increased use of contracts within the state; expanded costing and monetization of state patrimony; agentization; the introduction of stronger mechanisms of incentivization of public servants; the introduction of result-oriented management and output-oriented budgeting; and the introduction of new technologies of personnel and financial management that establish stronger signals of incentives and sanction for individuals. (Harrison 2005, p. 1309)

These measures were an attempt to streamline and bring certain forms of innovation in governance of sub-Saharan African states as well as provide the mechanism to strengthen state capacities and institutions while expanding market relations. In addition, the social infrastructure investment, particularly in road building and other similar projects were encouraged and funded by the World Bank to enhance the capacity of the state to reduce the negative impact of market failures. As Harrison observed, these measures became important for the IMF/World Bank because in the

1990s it became evident that reducing the state's 'unproductive' involvement in society was not a sufficient condition to ensure the development of 'properly' functioning markets. The funding of investments in social infrastructure can be read as a neoliberal reaction to market failure: the state should ensure the conditions for people to act socially in a market-conforming fashion. (Harrison 2005, p. 1310)

These shifts and emphases in the thinking of the IMF/World Bank incorporate a range of 'extra economic' concerns: from governance, to institutions; from social capital to civil society reflect neoliberalism as it exist today both as an ideology and a science of economic management, a form of social engineering at the disposal of transnational capital and international organizations (Harrison 2005, p. 1310).

Ambiguous transition: the Ethiopian case

Social historians and political scientists of socialist societies have been debating the nature of the 'transitions' that took place in the former socialist states, both in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Africa. These debates include disagreements about what constitutes a 'transition' – market reforms, privatization, civil society – as well as the appropriate analytic lens through which to study this process – state institutions, property, political elites, altered production, and consumption (Seley 1994, Verdery 1996, Stark 1996). As the Ethiopian case suggests, the transition is not a unilinear process of moving from one stage to the next, as suggested by neoliberal policymakers, but a highly uneven and ambiguous process. Rather than focusing on predetermined outcomes, it is important to examine the actual ways that the state withdraws from the economy, the process of deregulation, privatization and the changing property relations and state institutions.

For seventeen years (1974–1991), the military government, also known as the Derg, sought to build socialism in Ethiopia through central planning as a condition for improving the economic and social welfare of the population that had suffered centuries of exploitation under various predatory feudal and imperial regimes. In order to carry out its stated project of building socialism and bring material benefits to the population, the military government and its political allies embarked on three major structural reform programmes: first, on January 1975, barely one year after the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, the military government nationalized all banks, insurance companies and industrial and commercial firms and put them under state control. At the time, 87 manufacturing enterprises were nationalized in 1975. In the following few years, their number grew to 134, and by 1983 as many as 159 enterprises were nationalized. However, many of the nationalized enterprises were very old, and more than 50% of them were operating beyond their technically expected life, and were financially weak (Selvam 2007). The second reform programme was launched by nationalizing all rural land and making it the property of the state and creating a legal framework for the establishment of Peasant Associations responsible for administering the implementation of the programme. Barely six months after its first nationalization measure, the military government confiscated all urban land and all houses other than a family's primary dwelling and declared it the property of the state. Much like the rural peasant association, the government created the Urban Dwellers Association, also known as *Kebeles*, as the basic political unit for urban administration responsible for the implementation of various economic and social programmes. These urban and rural reform projects were carried out with ruthless precision, resulting in massive economic hardship on the population already exhausted by recurring famine, drought, disease, and poverty. Untold numbers of people simply perished as a result of the government's massive collectivization and forced resettlement programmes, while others became refugees in other parts of the country or in the neighbouring states. The years of 1974 to 1991 were also characterized by destructive secessionist wars which took the lives of an untold number of people, while the political struggle between various factions of the country's political elites for state control set in motion suicidal wars which decimated the country's skilled and productive generation.

The draconian laws and bureaucratic controls imposed by the military government affected all sectors of the economy which stagnated throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1987/88 and 1990/91 real GDP grew by an average

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

annual rate of 1.6%. At the same time, military expenditure absorbed 12–16% of GDP, while the fiscal deficit increased from 11.9% in 1987/88 to 13.2% in 1991/92. Per capita incomes were among the lowest, if not the lowest in the world (African Development Fund 2000, p. 4). During the period of 1990/91, 'Ethiopia's external debt rose to Birr 450 million and the total budgetary deficit was in excess of Birr 2 billion, about 60% of which was financed by borrowing from the banking system' (Chole 2004, p. 210). The situation in Addis Ababa was very grim as the retail prices index rose by 20.9%, compared to 5.3% for the previous year with an estimated number of unemployed well over 600,000. As the economist Chole concluded, the economy of Ethiopia on the eve of the demise of the military government was 'characterized by declining food availability, erosion in the purchasing power of income, rising unemployment, poor housing conditions, limited access to water and sanitation' (Chole 2004, p. 210).

The growing domestic and external criticisms as well as the rapid demise of socialism in Eastern Europe and the implosion of the former Soviet Union put considerable pressure on the military government to acknowledge the need for a fundamental change in the economic system. Thus in March 1990 a new reform programme was adopted (Chole 2004, p. 128) which called for:

- promotion of a mixed economy where all forms of enterprise – state, private, and cooperatives – operate in a competitive environment;
- greater use of the market mechanisms to guide economic decisions;
- elimination of state controls on the operation of the private sector (capital ceilings, area of operation, etc.) and active promotion of private economic activity;
- restructuring public enterprise management towards greater autonomy, competitiveness and profitability;
- promotion of foreign investment; and in agriculture, the abolition of Agricultural Marketing Corporation quota levies, lifting of all inter-regional grain movement controls, allowing the private sector to operate in grain marketing in a free market environment, security of land tenure, and strictly voluntary formation and/or dissolution of cooperatives.

These reforms came at a time when the military government was considerably weakened in the battlefield and had lost all of its remaining external and internal support. Although all the reform programmes were not implemented, two areas deserve special attention: agricultural marketing, and pricing as well as cooperatives. The March 1990 programme effectively reduced the role of the state in agriculture by decontrolling agricultural prices, abolishing all compulsory food grain quotas, dismantling the Agricultural Marketing Corporation's monopoly power, and allowing producers to sell agricultural produce in the free market. Furthermore, the reform programme abolished restrictions on wage labour in rural areas and inter-regional movement of grains. The March 1990 programme also abolished the drive for collectivization and dismantled producer cooperatives. Within a few months, all but a few of the cooperatives, including those that the state had held out as models, were duly abolished (Alemayehu 1991). Strategic commodities for export, such as coffee, tea, and pulses as well as those that serve as substitutes for imported goods (such as raw materials and improved seeds), remained under state control. By the time Colonel Mengistu departed to seek asylum in Zimbabwe in 1991, a significant shift had already

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

taken place toward the market orientation of the Ethiopian economy. Thus, the new government inherited an economy where state control had been effectively terminated.

The transition to market-oriented economy in Ethiopia rested on three overlapping policy reforms: (1) the issuance by the Transitional Government of an economic policy for the transitional period; (2) the conclusion of an agreement on economic recovery and reconstruction; and (3) negotiation for the launching of a structural adjustment programme with the IMF and World Bank (Chole 2004, p.211).

The new government which came to power in May 1991 adopted a number of market-oriented policies to rehabilitate and reconstruct the war-damaged economy by concluding an agreement to implement a structural adjustment programme with the World Bank and the IMF and signed the Policy Framework Paper (PFP) in September 1992. The agreement called for detailed policy measures to be undertaken as well as a time frame for their implementation. Three phases were outlined: during the first phase, the government was 'to initiate policies to tighten fiscal policy, strengthening monetary control and exchange rate adjustment'. During the second phase structural reforms were to be undertaken to 'complement stabilization objectives such as correction of price distortions, tariffs reforms and the stimulation of private sector'. The third phase would build on what was to be achieved in the context of the PFP agreement and emphasis would focus on 'building competitive markets, a closer integration with the international economy, a marked shift in the boundary between public and private production and reduction or elimination of costly controls'. The third phase would also 'concentrate on the resolution of the landownership issue, privatization of public enterprises, financial sector reforms and civil service reform' (African Development Fund 2000, p. 5). The aim of the reform programme (1992/93–1994/95) was to 'support the promotion of sustainable development and poverty reduction, through a fundamental transformation from a centralized planning to a market economy'. Accordingly, these programmes would 'liberalize the economy with an aim of rapidly accelerating economic growth, reducing inflationary pressures, correct the large internal and external imbalances and build up the exchange reserves ... lifting most domestic price controls, introduce a system of foreign auctions and reduce import tariffs' (IMF 1999, p. 7). These structural reform measures rested on two foundations: stabilization and liberalization. The former focused on improving the short-run macro-economic performance of the Ethiopian economy through fiscal austerity, monetary control and currency devaluation. On the other hand liberalization encompasses the removal of domestic controls and reducing import and export taxes. These policy measures according to the IMF were aimed at reviving the Ethiopian economy that had suffered many years of civil war, food crisis and central planning (IMF, 1999).

The available data for 1990–2001 suggest that GDP grew by an average of 4.7%, up from 1.1% annually during the 1980s. The World Bank (2004, p. 186) figure for the period 1990–2001 showed an annual growth in agriculture of 2.3%. This sector, which accounts for 52% of the GNP, showed little or no growth throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s when the military government was in power. Domestic investment during the period also grew by 13% annually while the export sector also performed as expected given the deregulation of the economy, registering a 9% growth annually over the same period – up from a 2.4% average growth per year

through the 1980s (World Bank 2000, p. 294). Foreign direct investment (FDI) has been increasing since the 1992 reforms, rising from 2% of total investment in 1995/96 to 59% in 1997/98. Saudi Arabia has been the single largest source, accounting for 60% of the FDI approved so far, with MIDROC Ethiopia, a private limited company, accounting for much of the investment.⁴ The European Union has been the second-largest source of FDI, providing about 30%. Ethiopians living abroad have also provided substantial FDI. Despite the EPRDF's rhetoric regarding the market orientation of the economy, FDI is excluded from large sections of the economy, including banking, insurance, broadcasting, and printing. These exclusions, together with infrastructure weaknesses, partly explain why Ethiopia receives less FDI than other developing countries (Economic Commission for Africa 2002, p. 86). However, these figures do not provide an adequate picture of the country's social problems. For example, the end of the military government and the debilitating war meant the 'demobilization of over 300,000 former soldiers, for whom no alternative sources of income have been found. They and their families, conservatively estimated at between half a million and 800,000 (in addition to the former soldiers), represent an immense social problem.' An additional 'one million people have been displaced by an ethnic conflict' and were living in makeshift camps which compounded the problem the country was facing (Chole 2004, p. 211). In Addis Ababa, the living conditions of the majority of the country were deteriorating in all areas of life, giving rise to destitute children and beggars who were roaming the streets of the city. In addition to these staggering numbers, the EPRDF entrenchment programme led to hundreds of individuals being fired from their jobs, either because of their ethnicity or because they worked for the previous military government.

The daunting task of addressing the dire economic and social problems of the country took a back seat as the EPRDF embarked on a political project of creating a highly decentralized form of government by carving the country into nine ethnic/linguistic *Kilil* (regional states),⁵ namely: Afar, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambela, Harari, Oromia, Somali, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and the Tigray national regional states. The city administration of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa were placed under direct federal control within the Prime Minister's Office.⁶ Each of the nine regional states is subdivided into zones, *weredas* and *kebeles*. The country now has 62 zones, 534 *weredas*, and about 10,000 *kebeles*. The new political dispensation enshrined in the Federal Constitution allows each decentralized state to maintain their language and cultural identities as well as fiscal independence and the power to form their own legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government – mirroring the federal government's administrative structure (see Figure 1).⁷

Privatization of the economy

As part of getting transnational capital and credit, the government grudgingly adopted market-oriented policies as a condition for qualifying for the stabilization and structural adjustment programme as required by the IFM and World Bank. These broad structural programmes are designed to reduce the role of the state in the economy and create an enabling environment for the market orientation. When the EPRDF came into power in 1991, there were 211 large and medium-sized

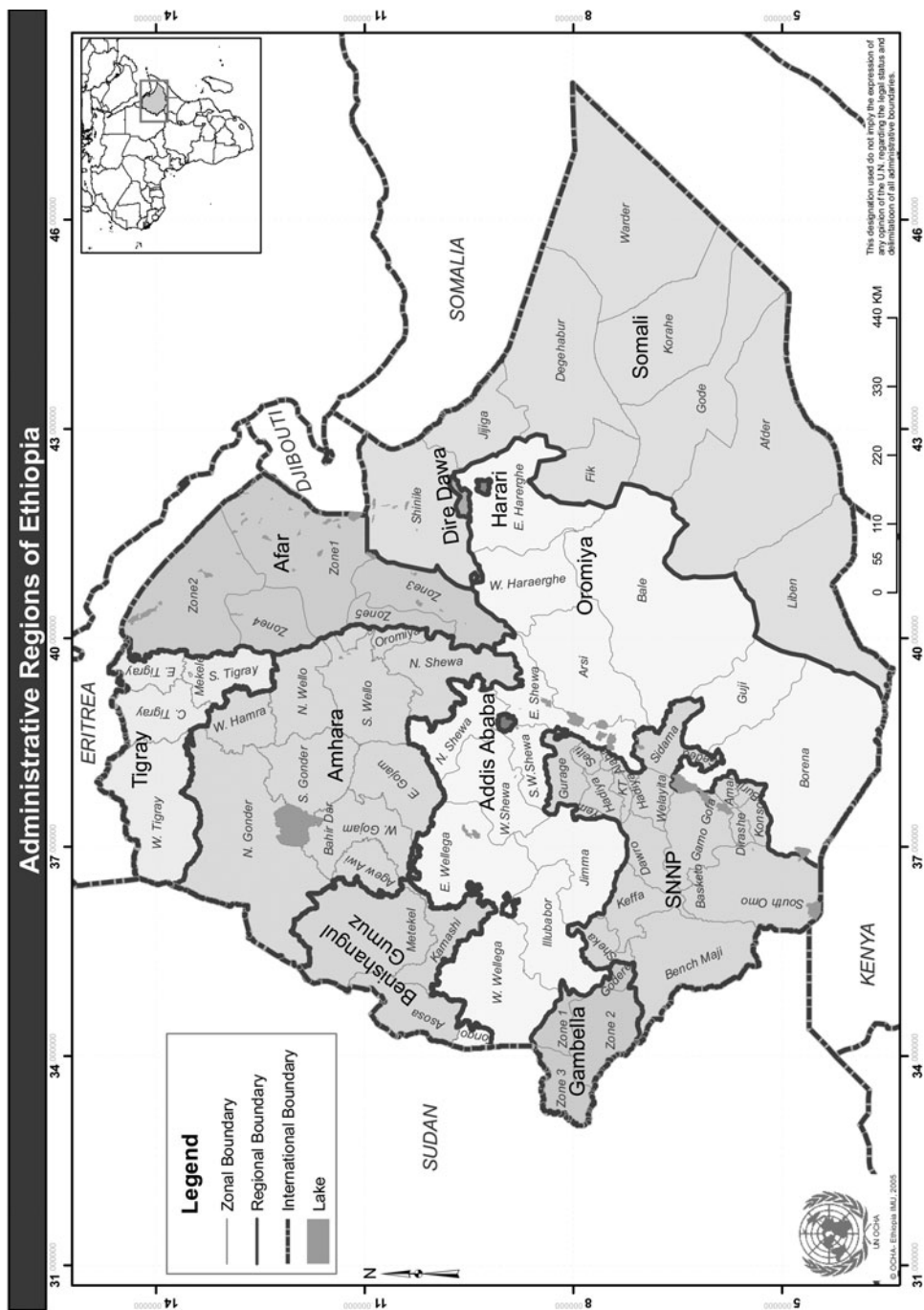


Figure 1. Administrative regions in Ethiopia.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

manufacturing plants under state control, of which 164 were under the management of the Ministry of Industry while the remaining 47 firms were under other ministries. As of 2002/03, there are only 141 enterprises (large and medium industries) under public ownership, employing around 56,588 employees out of 98,136 in this sector, whereas the private sector with 769 establishments has employed 41,551 (CSA 2003, p. 45). While the EPRDF government extols the virtue of liberalization, a free market and the privatization of state-owned assets, its record of privatization and deregulation is mixed. The government continues to control a significant portion of the Ethiopian economy. Land, fixed property, trade and financial establishments that were nationalized by the military in the 1970s are still in the hands of the state.

In 1994, EPRDF launched its privatization programme in accordance with Proclamation No.87/1994. The official objectives of the government's privatization are:

- To generate revenue required for financing development activities undertaken by the government;
- To change the role and participation of the government in the economy to enable it to exert more effort on activities requiring its attention; and
- To promote the country's economic development through encouraging the expansion of the private sector

The Ethiopian Privatization Agency (EPA)⁸ is the lead agency in carrying out the process of privatization with a board of management, consisting of five permanent members, who are designated by the government and a general manager, administers the agency which is directly accountable to the Prime Minister's Office in all matters.

To implement the broad privatization, the government created the EPA and began to privatize public enterprises of different sizes and operating in different sectors of the economy. Table 1 indicates that privatization started with 14 maiden transactions which contributed on an average US\$29.54 million a year and the volume rose to US\$51.46 million in the following fiscal year 1995/96. Privatization proceeds collected during the first phase, 1994/95 to 1998/99 were more substantial than the second phase, 1999/2000 to 2003/04. Of the total proceeds, 88.07% were collected during the first phase, whereas in the second phase it was only 11.93%. The

Table 1. Magnitude of privatization transactions 1994/1995–2002/2003.

Year	No. of privatizations	Privatization proceeds (PP) (US\$ millions)	GDP (US\$ millions)	PP/GDP (in percentage)
1994/95	14	29.54	5,779	0.51
1995/96	116	51.46	6,393	0.8
1996/97	26	18.72	6,725	0.28
1997/98	9	193.1	6,647	2.91
1998/99	21	89.12	7,067	1.26
1999/00	16	45.87	7,451	0.61
2000/01	11	2.97	8,106	0.04
2001/02	1	0.76	8,326	0.009
2002/03	3	0.56	6,638	0.008
Average	24	29.54	6277	0.21

Source: EPA (2003) and World Bank (2004).

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

first phase of the privatization (1997/98) was the peak moment in Ethiopian privatization history which yielded US\$193.1 million, constituting 45% of the total proceeds collected during the privatization period. In total, privatization between 1995 and 2003 yielded US\$433.7 million.

Between 1995 and the end of the first round of privatization in 1998, 186 units, spanning the whole gamut of activities (retail or wholesale, manufacturing, hotels and restaurants, agriculture, construction and mining) and representing an equivalent of 6.6 % of GDP had been sold (EPA 2002). By 2002/03, EPA sold some 217 state properties to various private concerns.

Table 2 provides a picture of the distribution of the privatized enterprises in the period 1994/95–2001/02. Most of the privatized firms (60%) were in retail, while manufacturing accounted for 17%, followed by agriculture 13%. Hotel and tourism and mining accounted for 8% and .04% accordingly. In addition, only 27 foreign companies, particularly in agriculture (16) and manufacturing (9), have been involved in the privatization process. As Gebeyehu (2004, p. 6) has noted: ‘the process of privatization has not been steady. 122 (54.7%) public firms were transferred to the private sector only in 1995/96. It took six additional years to privatize the remaining 89 (41.3%) enterprises.’ Participation by foreign firms has been limited and the government does not allow foreign participation in energy and financial services.

Table 2. Privatized public enterprises (1994/95–2001/02).

Sector	Privatized enterprises		Transferred to		Investors share %	
	Number	% share	Domestic investors	Foreign owners	Domestic	Foreign
Manufacturing	40	17%	31	9	77.5	22.5
Agriculture	31	13%	15	16	48.4	51.6
Hotel & tourism	18	8%	17	1	94.4	5.6
Retail trade	133	60%	133	0	100.0	0.0
Mining	1	0.4%	0	1	0.0	100.0
Total	223	100	196	27	87.9	12.1

Source: Gebeyehu 2004.

Table 3. Number of privatized industries.

Period	No. of enterprises returned to previous owners	Privatized enterprises	% share
1994/95		12	5.4
1995/96		122	54.7
1996/97		27	12.1
1997/98		15	6.7
1998/99	5	13	5.8
1999/00	4	22	9.9
2000/01	4	10	4.4
2001/02	1	2	0.9
Total	14	223	100

Source: Gebeyehu 2004.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

Since the EPA launched its privatization programme, many individuals whose properties have been illegally confiscated by the military government have filed claims to their property. By 1995, EPA had received some 17,000 such claims, out of which it rejected 13,000 and investigated further the remaining ones. Between 1994/95 and 1998/99, not a single illegally expropriated property was returned by the EPA to the original owners. A mere 14 enterprises were returned between 1998/99 and 2001/2002 (African Development Fund 2000, p. 14). While Table 3 provides some indication of the problems associated with privatization in Ethiopia, the problem is compounded by lack of transparency. The EPA does not provide any information on individuals or firms who are buying state assets.

The process of privatization has led to retrenchment of workers in the privatized sector resulting in the loss of employment. According to the figures of EPA (2002), 15,350 workers were employed in the privatized enterprises before they were transferred into private hands. By July 2002, the number of workers employed declined in all the privatized sectors with manufacturing losing 1,562 workers, followed by agriculture (157 workers), trade (26 and 25) as well as mining (4) (see Table 4).

While data regarding patterns of ownership of the privatized enterprises are not made public by the EPA, critics of the government argue that a handful of private companies with access to the ruling party are 'stifling the competition by acquiring special deals, inside information, unfettered access to resources from public financial institutional, relief from regulatory burdens, and preferential treatment in import and export processing' (Kebbede 2004, p. 10). The economist Hansson (2004) in his study on the role of the private sector in the Ethiopian economy singled out two of the largest business conglomerates in Ethiopia with links to the ruling party whose business practices have given them a commanding presence in the economy: the MIDROC Group (Mohammed International Development Research and Organization Companies), owned by the Saudi businessman Sheik Mohammad Hussein Al-Amoudi,⁹ and EFFORT (Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray), a business front for the TPLF which like MIDROC has also benefited considerably from the government's privatization process. Hansson's report identifies MIDROC's business activities ranging from

agricultural, industrial and service activities ... the newly completed luxury Sheraton Hotel in Addis Ababa, the Pepsi-Cola factory in Addis Ababa, the National Mining Corporation, Dashen Bank, and Nyala Insurance Company ... as well as companies in

Table 4. Manpower situation of privatized enterprises.

Sector	Transferred workers when privatized	Workers, July 2002	Difference in number	Difference in %
Agriculture	760	603	-157	-20.6579
Manufacturing	14036	12474	-1562	-11.1285
Hotels	170	145	-25	-14.7059
Trade	334	241	-93	-27.8443
Mining (Water construction)	70	74	4	5.714286
Total	15370	13537	-1833	-11.9258

Source: Gebeyehu 2004.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

agriculture, transport, and the construction sectors. According to informal information, MIDROC-Ethiopia also has, or has advanced, plans to go into the health and education sector, including the establishment of a private university. (Hansson 2004, p. 26)

The other business conglomerate is the EFFORT group, which was established in 1995 and operates as a public endowment. Although EFFORT releases few details about its operations and assets, it serves as an umbrella organization for companies operated by the TPLF. According to Hansson (2004) EFFORT is involved in a variety of business ventures including agriculture and agro-processing, construction and engineering, manufacturing and mining. EFFORT also operates the Wegagan Bank, which has a network of 36 branches spread across the country with a total asset worth of 2.3 billion and a new profit of 70.9 million Birr in 2006 (*Addis Fortune*, 1 July 2007). One of the companies operated by EFFORT is the Trans-Ethiopia Company (TESCO) which in 1995/96 alone controlled 35% of Ethiopian freight market. Hansson's study notes that such a 'market position of TESCO, together with rules and procedures in the transport sector, easily lead to distortions and a feeling of discrimination among private individual truckers and trucking associations' and concluded that

from the point of view of efficient competition, as indicated by the experience from the transport sector and revealed in the surveys about the business climate mentioned above, the close relationship between TPLF and the present Ethiopian government easily creates doubts about the equal treatment of EFFORT-companies and other non-party-related private companies. As there is no efficient and working commercial legislation, these doubts, well founded or not, easily create problems concerning the government's legitimacy and the credibility of its private sector policies (Hansson 2004, p. 27).

In response to criticism regarding the dominance of a few business conglomerates with connections to the political organizations of the ruling party, the EPRDF announced a new law (Proclamation No. 329/2003) designed to streamline business practices through anti-trust legislation. The new proclamation applies to all commercial activities except such activities that, according to the investment proclamation, are reserved for the Ethiopian government. While the legislation satisfies the concerns of international donors, the law has little effect on the operations or business practices of MIDROC or EFFORT.

The urban faces of neoliberalism: urban crisis in Addis Ababa

Given the role of cities in economic development, the IFM/World Bank in recent years has focused their lending policies on enhancing the productivity of cities as 'an engine of growth' adding value to rural products, providing services to regional markets and attracting manufacturing and service investments (Burgess *et al.* 1997, pp. 19–20). Macro-economic policies associated with structural adjustment programme have identified constraints which impede urban productivity such as:

- The inadequate coverage and inefficient maintenance and operation of infrastructure increased the production costs of urban firms, lessened their competitive advantage and diminished labour productivity.
- It was argued that the excessive regulation of land and housing markets by the state (particularly in relation to inefficient and inappropriate land use, infrastructure, zoning and building standards) produced demand-or-supply-side

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

constraints. These constraints decreased the quality of investment available to expand coverage, decreased affordability, and led to subsidies.

- It was argued that inefficient and inadequate shelter, infrastructure, health, education and training facilities constrained labour productivity and that excessive regulation of businesses and informal sector diminished employment and income-generation opportunities.
- A wide range of financial and institutional constraints on productivity were identified which include: inadequate urban management capacity and skills; inappropriate distribution of power between central and local governments; weak taxation capacity; inappropriate subsidies; and inadequate financial services for urban development.

One of the hallmarks of neoliberalism is ‘to improve urban productivity and efficiency through the development or “enablement” of markets and privatization; deregulation or reform of regulatory regimes; decentralization and increased popular participation; and institutional and management capacity-building on a city-wide programme and sectoral rather than on a project basis’. In addition, ‘deregulation and the reform of the regulatory regime in land, housing, finance infrastructure, services and employment markets are seen as essential for increasing overall levels of urban productivity and efficiency’ (Burgess *et al.* 1997, p. 20).

Although, compared to other sub-Saharan African countries, Ethiopia was a newcomer to structural adjustment programmes, the implementation of the IFM/ World Bank market orientation programmes required the EPRDF government to reduce public expenditure and the role of the state in production and distribution, controlling prices and intervening in exchange and product market as well as in the liberalization of the markets, financial sector and privatization. The consequences of privatization and reduction of public expenditure on the urban population, particularly in Addis Ababa and other urban centres, has been acute. Most of the disbanded military and security personnel from the previous military government, university lecturers and other civil service employees who were fired by the EPRDF government, as well as entrenched workers from the privatized business enterprises, swelled the rank of unemployed. On the pretext of increasing productivity and efficiency, the EPRDF carried out a restructuring process which impacted a significant portion of the population in Addis Ababa. The demobilization of military and security personnel of the previous government was extensive. More than 300,000 former soldiers were disbanded. None of the demobilized soldiers were integrated into EPRDF’s army. These demobilized soldiers became part of the growing army of unemployed in Addis Ababa and other urban centres.

The unemployment problem in Addis Ababa has increased at an alarming rate in recent years. The total unemployment rate in 1976 was 9.6% (Andargatchew 1992). In 1984, the unemployment rate was 10.5% and, in 1994, total unemployment sharply rose to 34.7%. This is an increase of 24.2 percentage points between the two census periods. The unemployment rate is consistently higher for females than males in both 1984 and 1994.

A socio-economic household sample survey of seven major cities in Ethiopia with a population of 100,000 or more after the EPRDF assumed power showed a high degree of urban unemployment and poverty. For example, Addis Ababa had 41.7% of its workforce unemployed; Awasa 36.1%; Bahir Dar 31%; Dessie 38.5%; Dire Dawa 45.1%; Jimma 34.1%; and Mekele 29.6%. The majority of the unemployed are young:

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

about 68% were between the ages of 16 and 25 and 90% were below the age of 35. Over 80% of the employed were first-time job-seekers. Of the 119,215 urban registered job-seekers between 1995 and 1999 (67,1010 men and 52,114 women) only 11% got placements (cited in Kebede 2004, p. 37). Another study conducted by the Labour and Social Affairs Bureau of Addis Ababa Region, in 1994, shows that of the registered unemployed 8% were illiterate; 8% could read and write; 16% completed elementary school, and 15% completed junior secondary; about 50% completed grade 12, and 3% had technical and vocational training; 0.7% had not completed college and 0.6% had completed college or university (cited in Minas 2002).

A survey carried out by the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) in 48 major urban centres in 1997 found that three-quarters of a million people were engaged in the informal sector, of which almost two-thirds were women. Four-fifths of the activities were owner-operated. Forty-seven per cent of those involved in manufacturing of petty commodities, 42% were in trade, hotel and restaurant businesses, and 11% were engaged in various activities, including street vending. Figures for Addis Ababa show that 61% of employment is in the informal sector making the city one of the largest concentrations of informal sector activity in the world, only surpassed by Kinshasa (80%), Accra (70%), Lagos (69%), Mumbai (68%), Delhi (76%), and Abidjan (65%) (cited in Kebede 2004, p. 38).

The incidence of urban poverty is also deepening in the major cities of the country. According to a study carried out by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED), urban poverty increased by 4 percentage points (from 33 to 37%) during the period 1995 to 1999, while rural poverty declined by 2 percentage points (from 47 to 45%) over the same period. While the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) reported no significant change in rural inequality in the same period, it registered a rising level of urban inequality, with an increase in the Gini coefficient from 0.34 to 0.38 over the period 1995 to 1999 and again to 0.44 in 2004 in urban areas (cited in Muzzini 2008, p.7). Yet, the scale and depth of urban poverty in Addis Ababa is generally underestimated by the government.

Like many other cities in sub-Saharan Africa, Addis Ababa suffers from rapid urban growth, crumbling and non-existent urban infrastructure, high unemployment, overcrowding, acute housing shortages, urban poverty and inequality, deteriorating service delivery capacity coupled with environmental degradation and an exploding informal settlement. The problem is compounded by fragile public institutions and a weak urban governance structure with limited capacity to provide and deliver services as well as mobilize resources to generate the required economic development in the city.

Urban housing and infrastructure

The Office for the Revision of Addis Ababa Master Plan (ORAAMP) 'estimated that 60% of the city's core housing is dilapidated, and about a quarter of all housing units have been built informally' (ORAAMP 2002a). Shortage of housing is acute, especially for the low-income households that account for over 80% of the city's population. Over-crowding and deterioration of housing are commonplace in the city. As indicated in a study by the Addis Ababa Water Supply Agency, 82% of the population in the city lives in unplanned, high-density and sub-standard housing. Another study by the National Urban Planning Institute (NUPI)

indicates that a substantial proportion of the housing stock in the city is considered to require upgrading, while about 15% is beyond any kind of repair (ORAAMP 2002a).

Inadequate municipal and industrial dry-waste collection and disposal creates a range of environmental problems in Addis Ababa. A considerable amount of waste ends up in open dumps or the drainage system, threatening both surface water and ground-water quality and causing flooding, which provides a breeding-ground for disease-carrying pests. Open-air burning of waste, spontaneous combustion in landfills, and incinerating plants that lack effective treatment for gas emissions are causing air pollution. The situation is exacerbated in slums where households cannot make use of garbage collection containers. Lack of the most basic solid-waste services in crowded, low-income neighbourhoods is a major contributor to the high morbidity and mortality among the urban poor. The adverse effects of an inadequate solid-waste service on productivity and economic development of the city are expected to be significant.

Garbage collection remains one of the major problems facing the city. An estimated 35–40% of the solid waste generated is left uncollected and dumped on any available site. Piles of garbage, flying ‘festal’ (which is increasingly used for packaging), rubbish, construction demolition and moved-earth from new construction sites are common sights in the city. Obnoxious odours emanating from decomposing solid wastes, semi-liquid and liquid waste add to environmental hazards facing residents of Addis Ababa.¹⁰ Available data for 1993 shows that households generate the lion’s share of solid waste in the city. From total solid waste generated, households account for 71%, streets 10%, commercial institutions 9%, industries 6%, hotels 3% and hospitals 1%, respectively (Kuma 2004).

The lack of service provision exacerbates the already poor living and working conditions. ORAAMP reported that only less than 65% of the reachable solid waste generated in the city is collected, the remaining being simply dumped in open sites, drainage channels, rivers and valleys as well as on streets. About 67% of the people in the city use dry-pit latrines while 42% of the existing public latrine facilities are used by four to nine households and often overflow. Rivers and streams have also become open sewers where households’ liquid wastes, as well as industrially toxic and hazardous effluents, are discharged without being treated, hence negatively affecting animals and people living along the valleys. The existing sewerage system is serving only about 15% of the city’s population. Likewise, over 25% of the residents are without any kind of sanitation facilities and even the existing latrines are not emptied regularly. These glaring shortcomings, coupled with low water consumption (30 litres a day per person), in addition to the ever increasing vehicular traffic imposing severe air pollution and noisy conditions, have aggravated the sanitation problems of the city. National figures show that these problems are leading causes of acute respiratory infections, skin and parasitic diseases, resulting in mortality and morbidity. Flooding also has had a great impact on people who have settled in vulnerable areas of the city. In 1987, 108 *Kebeles* (out of 289) and, in 1994, 7,655 people were affected by death and loss of houses, among others (Tewodros and Zeleke 2001).

The most visible manifestation of the urban crisis is the lack of access to basic water and sanitation. The Addis Ababa Water Supply Authority (AAWSA) can only supply 60% of the current demand and it is estimated that 30–40% of potential water supply does not reach the consumer. Leaking pipes and outdated distribution and

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

infrastructure have led to constant interruptions in the water supply and distribution system (Ayenew 1999).

In addition to the urban water supply problem, provision of adequate sanitation is perhaps the most critical problem for the residents of Addis Ababa. According to the municipal administration, 16% of the residents of the city have private toilets, 54% use shared latrines and about 30% do not have any toilet and are forced to use open space (Ayenew 1999). Addis Ababa's first sewerage network is only 110 km long and only serves the central part of the city which represents only 3.7% of the total requirement for the city as a whole. Based on this figure, it means that a minuscule 5% of the residents of the city are served by some kind of sewerage and drainage system. The sanitary sewer system serves only the commercial areas and perhaps 15% of the higher-income population. Waterborne sanitation, however, will remain unaffordable to the vast majority of households for many years to come.

Poor governance and municipal tax base

Despite the growing economic importance of the cities in national development, the policy and institutional framework for managing urban growth in many sub-Saharan African countries remains weak. Besides the persistence of inappropriate macro-economic policies at the national level, central government control of national development policy has paid little attention to critical responsibilities of local government institutions, such as the operation and maintenance of infrastructure, and the establishment of incentives and an enabling legal environment for private economic actors to operate.

The crisis facing Addis Ababa is compounded by failure to solve the central government–local government jurisdictional issue. The city lacks powers required for effective political and economic decision-making, particularly in critical areas such as investment in urban infrastructure, service delivery, revenue generation, and promoting urban economic development. The decentralization programme of the current government has created more organizational and management problems for the urban governance of Addis Ababa, which is the capital city of the federal government and the seat of Oromia regional state and a separate autonomous administration. These overlapping jurisdictions and the multiple status of the city have given rise to fiscal and legal problems. The absence of a clearly defined status and jurisdiction has constrained the city's authority in raising sufficient revenues and taxes for development. Although the city is a chartered urban government, it does not have legal or regulatory authority over the utility corporations that are state-owned in the city. As Ayenew (1999, p. 17) suggested, the residents of Addis Ababa

[have] been incurring tremendous costs to repair the damage to houses and streets caused by the uncoordinated activities of the utility companies. The residents endure a great deal of inconvenience as a result of frequent interruptions and outages of services. The cost of rehabilitating damaged streets and other infrastructure left in disrepair by these public corporations has become an added burden on the taxpaying residents of Addis Ababa.

This problem is compounded by weak capacity in the city government to plan and manage urban development in a sustainable way. Currently, the city of Addis Ababa does not collect property taxes on land as it is the property of the state.¹¹ Since the 1974 nationalization of land measure by the previous government, which put all converted land, rental houses and private buildings as state property, the city has been deprived

of collecting property taxes. The present government has made some modification to this policy by allowing individuals to secure land through a lease system. Under the present lease system, land cannot be subjected for sale or inheritance or used as collateral. Hence, the municipality of Addis Ababa cannot raise its income via land taxes to provide badly needed urban services or maintain amenities as well as expand existing infrastructure development. The present land lease system, while depriving the municipality tax revenues, has also exacerbated the housing problem in the city. For the vast majority of the urban poor, land lease is not affordable and hence they resort to erecting makeshift shelters and settle in unplanned and illegal settlements outside the city. The number of people who have chosen to find shelter in the squatter settlements located on the outskirts of the city has increased dramatically over the past two decades. While the exact number of people who live in these settlements is hard to come by, the UN-Habitat has estimated that more than 60,000 squatter units were built in the city in 2000, representing some 20% of the city's housing stock. Studies that have been undertaken suggest that a vast majority of the squatter units in the city have been constructed since the EPRDF took power in 1991 (UN-Habitat 2007, p. 32).

Conclusion

The report of the United Nations Fund for Population revealed that the population of Ethiopia was 73 million in July 2005, putting the country as the second most populous country in Africa. According to the CSA, current population growth is estimated to be 2.8% per annum, and the growth rate is expected to remain above 2% for the next 20 years. Rural population is growing at about 3% while the urban population is growing at about 4.3%. Total population is projected to reach 129 million by 2030 and the size of urban population is likely to continue to grow at a high rate in the future. The share of urban population will rise from 16% in 2005 to about 23% by 2030. Nearly 30 million of the total 129 million will live in cities and towns by 2030.

The demographic growth will pose serious problems and challenges in terms of providing housing, drinking water, and sanitation and garbage collections. Given the current institutional arrangement and the lack of resources, municipal authorities will have to develop different approaches to deal with the problems and challenges facing cities in Ethiopia. As the example of other African cities suggest, neoliberal approaches to housing, water, sanitation and urban transport will not address the problems facing the residents of the city. Privatization of municipal services, water and garbage collection will worsen the situation and exacerbate the social division between different income groups, and will deepen the crisis further.

Notes

Many thanks to Sandra Jackson for comments on an earlier draft.

1. Interview given by Makasha Zebene, whose home was demolished by municipal authorities in Addis Ababa, to Nita Bhalla, *BBC News, World Edition*, and 'Ethiopia Slum Razed to Ground' 2002.
2. The ruling political party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is an alliance of four groups: the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the South Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDF) and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TFPL). The alliance is largely dominated by the TPLF. Having shed its Marxist ideology to win

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

the favours of international donors, the EPRDF, is currently led by Meles Zenawi, its Chairman and Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. According to the *Financial Times* (9 June 2005), in the mid-1970s, Mr Zenawi, 'was brimming with Marxist-Leninist ideologies ... and called for Albanian-style socialism. But as [his] guerrillas marched on Addis Ababa they realized they were entering an altered world: communism was collapsing and Marxists had few allies.' See, also Berehe (2004) for the origin of TPLF.

3. In response to slow growth and balance of payment problems facing many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank modified its original structural adjustment programme in 1990s to include poverty reduction strategies.
4. MIDROC Ethiopia plc is owned by a Saudi national, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi; it controls more than thirty interrelated business companies and is one of the two largest beneficiaries of the privatization process in Ethiopia. The company is involved in almost all sectors of the economy, with particular emphasis on construction, light and heavy manufacturing industries, agriculture and agro-industry, mining, beverage production and the service industries including hotels, tour operation, commercial and trading transport, health care and real estate development. The other beneficiary of the Ethiopian privatization process is EFFORT Group (Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray) – a TPFL-affiliated business conglomerate that was established in 1995 and operates in various business ventures in agriculture and agro-processing, transport, cement production, construction and engineering, manufacturing, textile, mining, services, including banking (Wegagan) and transport (TESCO) Together these two conglomerates represent an enormously influential and strategically integrated bloc, dominating key sectors of the economy. Public information about the operations of MIDROC and EFFORT or links between them remains very limited. See Hansson 2004, Young 2004, Vistal 1999.
5. The word '*Kilil*' which specifically means 'reservation' or 'protected area' and the ethnic basis of the regions in Ethiopia under the EPRDF government has drawn wide criticism from the opposition, who have drawn comparisons to the Bantustans of apartheid South Africa.
6. In the federal constitution of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa is a chartered city (*ras gez astedader*), and enjoys the status of both a city and a state. The EPRDF declared that Addis Ababa was the federal capital of Ethiopia in 1995 and the city has an elected council and city governor. In addition to being the federal capital, the city now also serves as the seat of the Oromia regional state (the regional constitution of Oromia state refers to the city as 'Finfine' rather than Addis Ababa). The relocation of the regional capital from Addis Ababa to Adama (formerly Natherth) sparked considerable controversy. Critics of the move believed that the EPRDF wished to de-emphasize Addis Ababa's location within Oromia. On the other hand, the government maintained that Addis Ababa had been found inconvenient from the point of view of developing the language, culture and history of the Oromo people. After considerable public investment in Adama to make the city a regional capital, the EPRDF government reversed its previous decision and made Addis Ababa once again the regional capital of Oromia state in 2005.
7. The adoption of a highly decentralized form of government in Ethiopia has created considerable legal nightmares in terms compliance with federal laws. Currently, it is unclear if all the federal laws of the country are uniformly applied outside the capital city.
8. The Ethiopian Privatization Agency (EPA) was given greater autonomy over the whole privatization programme and reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister. Previously, the agency was under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance.
9. On 14 September 2007, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi awarded Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Al Amoudi the 'first special millennium golden medal' for his business practice in Ethiopia.
10. Constant stench, according to public health experts, is likely to cause rhinitis (allergy of the nose), sinusitis (allergy of the sinus) and an even more serious condition called bronchial asthma.

ETHIOPIA IN TRANSIT

11. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi gave the following reasons why his government has no intention of returning nationalized lands. First, he noted that allowing private ownership of land has the potential to turn land into a speculative commodity and second, private ownership is not desirable in Ethiopia since labour is more abundant relative to capital, and the agriculture development strategy must be one that utilizes it most intensely. The Prime Minister's argument goes against the stated policy of his government towards privatization. See Kassahun 2002.

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Index

- Aari people 126
- abduction 138, 158
- absorption agencies 61–2
- Abyssinian Kingdom 118
- accountability 97
- action 35, 120
- activists 70, 85, 86–7, 109, 140
- Addis Ababa 18, 192, 205–7
- Addis Ababa University 109
- administration 18, 80, 82
- ado achi* 123, 128
- advocacy 108–9
- Aemero* 20
- Afar 155
- affirmative action 103
- Africa: imagined 74; sub-Saharan 195–6
- African Charter on Human and People's Rights 103
- agar* 52
- Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) 155
- agricultural marketing 198
- agriculture 144, 152
- AIDS 137
- Aksum 13, 79–80
- Alemayehu, H. 44
- All Amhara Political Organization (AAPO) 87
- All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) 33, 39
- altar 178
- Amara 51
- amari* 81
- Amhara 88–9, 122; defining 81–3; perceptions of 126
- Amharic 19, 23, 82, 117
- Amharic dictionary 81
- anthropology 180
- anti-trust legislation 205
- apathy 108, 137, 147
- Aqtacha* 170, **171**
- army 19, 65–6, 80, 166
- art: graphic 164; performance 175, **176**; public 173; school 164, 166–7; socialist realism 165
- Ashkenazim 61
- assimilation 82, 84, 127
- atsme rist* 23
- autocracy 17, 105
- Awate, H.I. 31
- Axumite Kingdom 7
- babies 176–7
- Babur* **170**
- bad times 41
- bagrut* 64
- Bala 117
- banda* 39
- bank 19
- banquet halls 20
- beher* 52
- beher teyaqe* 51
- be'herawi gizat* 7
- bell 43
- Berg Report 195
- bernos* 164
- Beta Israel 2, 59–76
- Bible 11
- bilingualism 119
- biodiversity 144–5, 146
- birr* 19
- body 188
- Bojje 175, 177, 179
- Bojje* **180**
- Bonapartism 36
- books 20
- bottle caps 176, 187
- boundaries 79, 124
- buda* 68, 72
- budgeting 96
- burial 41
- business conglomerates 204, 205
- buttons 171, 172
- capability deprivation 133, 135

INDEX

- care-seeking 136
- ceiling fabric 169–71
- central planning 197
- change: bloodless 40
- chauvinism: Amhara 85; social 37
- Cherqos 163, 169
- child mortality 156
- childbirth 157
- children 125, 158; immigrant 63; invisible 71
- chores 136
- Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) 109
- Christianity 23, 67, 118, 122, 128
- circles 179
- citizenship 20
- civil service 17–18, 135
- civil society 94, 133, 141; controlling 111; and development 140, 142; and gender equality 99, 107; and government 110; state supervision 96, 108
- civilization 74, 85; material 43
- civilizing mission 73, 74
- class 33, 34, 93
- clergy 20, 164
- climate 144
- clitoridectomy 137
- clothes 167
- Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) 86
- Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces 39–40
- coffee 184
- cognition 140
- collage 164, 187
- collectivization 197, 198
- college 64; technological 65
- colonial question 33
- colonialism 79
- combat units 65
- Commission of Inquiry 40
- Communist Parties 48
- condemnation 39
- consciousness: double 74; ethnic 89, 106
- conservation 145, 148; civic interventions 150–1; public awareness 151
- constitution 11, 102–5
- contamination 124
- continuity 14–15
- contradiction: irreconcilable 42–3
- control 93–4, 102–5, 110, 132
- Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 104
- conversion 63, 66, 67, 118
- cooking 136
- cooperatives 198
- Corinaldi, M. 68
- coronation 12
- counter-revolution 34, 35, 39, 41
- country 18
- court: imperial 82
- crop cultivation 145–6
- cult group 71
- cultivation 152
- cultural authenticity 54
- cultural continuity 71
- cultural death 75
- cultural diversity 106
- cultural values 125
- culture 80, 104–5; attacking 41; Beta Israel 59–60, 60–3; emasculated 62; global 74; pride in 126, 128; threatened 75
- currency 19
- dawal* 43
- death 123
- Debre Tabor Gebeya* 168, **169**
- debt 195
- decentralization 88, 92, 94, 104–7, 200, 209
- deforestation 145–6
- delegation 105
- demobilization 200, 206
- democracy 1, 54, 74; communal 50, 51, 54; and development 134; path to 88; political 50, 134–5; revolutionary 142, 157; standards 102; substantive 55
- deregulation 202, 206
- Derg 197; and the arts 165; demise of 198; describing 39; and Marxism 40; sadism 41–2, 46; scholarship on 1
- development 54; and civil society 140, 142; and democracy 134; gender-equitable 101; meaning of 132; pastoral 155; and population 155–60; rural 148, 152–5; sustainable 144–52, 155; urban 209
- dialogue 73
- diaspora 2, 74, 75, 84–5, 86; Beta Israel 59–60; conflict-generated 86
- dictatorship: military 37
- difference 55
- dignity 54
- diplomatic missions 20
- discontinuity 15
- discrimination 60, 68, 70–2, 100, 135
- disease 133
- disempowerment 139
- disintegration 22
- disruption 72
- divine envy 71
- domination 50
- donor funding 96, 141–2, 149
- Doro Tera* **164**
- drought 152
- dung 147

INDEX

- dynasty: outrages against 11
 economic crisis 195
 economic growth 132
 economic integration 192
 economic reform 198, 199
 economic specialization 72
 economic stabilization 193
 economy: market-oriented 199; stagnated 197–8; subsistence 154
 ecosystem 144; and natural resources 153
 education 73, 96, 156–7; Beta Israel 63–4; and empowerment 132; modern 19; primary 63, 156; rejecting 124; secondary 63–4, 156–7; traditional 19; of women 93, 135, 136
EFFORT 204, 205
 Egziabher, T.G. 152
 election 1, 124, 134
 electricity 151
elfegne 20
 elite 52, 82, 127, 129
Elli **181**
 emotions 167, 170–1, 187
 employment 204
 empowerment 55, 153
Enat **180**
Enat ena Lij **167**
 enemy 45
 energy 147
 English 125
 environment 133–52
 environmental crisis 145, 150
 environmental degradation 145
 Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE) 150
 environmental protection 148–52
 Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) 149
ereq 43
ergeman 39
 Eritrea 21, 25, 86
 Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) 31
 Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) 21–2, 32
Ethiopia: from Autocracy to Revolution (Hiwet) 35–6
 Ethiopia: historic 36; name 24; Revolutionary 41
 Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) 34, 35
 Ethiopian Forestry Action Plan 146
 Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) 43, 50
 Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) 3, 32, 47; and environment 146, 148–52; and ethnic affiliation 83; and liberalization 202; and political democracy 134; and population 159–60; and reproductive rights 157; and women's rights 141–3
 Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) 33, 37, 42
 Ethiopian Privatization Agency (EPA) 202
 Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM) 32–3, 37–8
 Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (EWLA) 107, 108, 139, 143
 ethnic colonialism 22
 ethnic conflict 200
 ethnic disputes 135
 ethnic groups 79–80, 119, 125
 ethnic movement 120
 ethnic nationalism 3, 120, 128
 ethnicity 3, 24, 53, 80, 83, 88, 119–20; prejudice 158; turned violent 120
 ethnohistories 6
 ethnonationalism 25; Oromo 22
 Eurocentrism 2, 44–5
 European Union (EU) 200
 Europeans 17
 events 35
 evil eye 68, 72
 excavation 13
 excision 137
 exhibition 173
 external distinction 126

 Falash Mura 66–70
 family 158
 family planning 157
 famine 1, 148, 152
 fascism 39
 father land 123, 128
 fear 132, 137
 federalism: ethnic 9, 88, 100
Felega **177, 178**
 female genital mutilation (FGM) 137–8
 feminism 97, 109
Feqer Iska Maqaber 44
Fertility 189
 fertility rate 156
feteh 49
Fetha Nagast 50
 fistula 138
Fitha Negest 18
 flooding 208
Flow 183
 food aid 155
 food insecurity 144, 145, 153
 foreign trade 194
 freedom 122, 133, 134–5, 143
 French 19
 Friedman, M. 192
 fuel-wood 147
 future 55

INDEX

- gabi* 164
gada 22
 Gada 50, 84
 garbage collection 208
 GDP 199
gebbar 122
geber 18
geber adarash 20
 Gebreyesus, H. 36, 37
gedle 16
 Ge'ez 51
 gender 3, 98, 107, 111, 157
 gender awareness 96
 gender desks 107, 108
 Gender and Development (GAD) approach 97
 gender equality 91, 99
 gender inequality 135–43
 gender issues 94, 111
 gender mainstreaming 97–8, 111
 gender relations 55, 92, 135, 142
 gender studies 109
 generations: future 158
 globalization 49, 75
Glory of Kings 10–11
 goats 183–4, **184**
Godana **165**
 GONGOs 108, 112
gono 173, 174
gota 180
Gota Teret-Teret 180–1
 governance: poor 209–10
 government: and civil society 110; delegations 101; ignorant 152; intervention 194; local 209; officials 10; regional 100, 105, 106; restructuring 196; spending 194; urban 209; and women's emancipation 108
 graphic art 164
 grave 41
Green Flame 183
 group cohesion 120
 group loyalty 120, 124–6
 Guditi 16
 Gurage 23, 175, 177, 178

ha'ger 18
Halafinet 176
 Hammons, D. 173
 Hayek, F. 192
 health 132–3, 133, 136
 Hebrat 40
Hebratasabawinat 40
 Hebrew 66
he'g 18, 49
hega arawit 49
 heroism 38
hezboch 52

he'zeb 18
hezeb qotera 18
 highlands 147
 historians 8; travel 13
 historical *a priori* 17
 historical depth 48
 historiography: critical 6, 21–4; state-authorized 2, 5–25
 history: challenging 21; cultural 16; Eritrean 21; as metanarrative 6, 15; murdering 6; political 10; sense of 10, 15; social 16; state 6; statement of 7–16
 Hiwet, A. 35–7
 homeland 84–5; Jewish 71, 72–3
 homelessness 168
 homework 63
 honesty 126
 housing 64, 205–6, 207–9
 Human Development Index (HDI) 132
 human rights 51, 102
 humane generation 158
 humanitarian assistance 69
 humanity 175
 hunter-gatherers 153

 ideas 163; leftover 49; pre-packaged 53
 identity 60, 71; Amhara 3, 83, 83–4; Beta Israel 59–60; collective 80; diverse 75; ethnic 89, 120; national 20, 80; primordial 63; quest for 84–5; safeguarding 122
 ideology 35
idil 48
 ignorance 140
 illiteracy 133, 151
 illness 71, 72
 imbalances 196
 immigrants 62–3, 67–70, 85–8
 immigration quota 70
 inequality 135–43, 207
 infibulation 137
 influence: political 95, 96
 informal sector 207
 infrastructure 207–9
 inscriptions 13–14, 15
 Institute of Archaeology 13
 Institute of Ethiopian Studies 12–13
 insurrections 147–8
 integration 62–3, 73, 74
 intellectual tradition 48
 intellectuals 17; leaders 127; organic 44
 intelligentsia 43, 43–4, 49
 intermarriage 122, 124
 internal cohesion 126
 international community 94
 International Monetary Fund (IMF) 192, 193–4, 196
 interpretations 13

INDEX

- intimidation 132
- investment 199–200
- isolation 75
- Italian occupation 8–9, 17, 45, 122–3
- Itopyawinat* 36, 38
- Japanizers 43
- Jara Park 173
- Jemot* 178, **179**
- Jewish Agency 69, 70
- Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) 69, 70
- Jews 61, 68
- Jinka 125
- Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12
- Judaism 66
- jungle: law of 49
- jurisdictions: overlapping 209
- justice 49, 143; chairs 18; gender 104; social 38, 46, 54
- kebeles* 197, 200
- kefu qan* 41
- Kelebo, M. 125
- Keynesianism 192
- Kibre Negest* 10, 11, 12
- kileloch* 9
- Kilil* 200
- kings 8, 11, 14; justice of 18
- knowledge 136, 140; and power 10, 132; producing 6; theoretical 35
- knowledge systems 150–1, 154
- Lake Alemaya 151
- Lake Awassa 151–2
- lakes 146–7, 151
- land: cultivable 155; degradation 147, 154; disengaging from 153; fragmentation 152; lease system 210; ownership 23, 154; quest for 84; regulating 205–6; rights 135; rural 197; safeguarding 122; survey 18; tenure 148, 154; urban 197
- language 3, 51, 82, 124–6; alphabetical order 45; Amharic 81; correct 125; cross-border 117; death 119; dominant 118; gendered 98; king's 118; local 23; Maale 117–29; maintenance 118–19, 121, 128; official 19, 23; and rights 119; Sabean 13–14; shift 117, 118–19, 121
- Last, G.C. 148
- latrine facilities 208, 209
- law 18; cultural 104; customary 104, 106; enforcement of 104, 139; environmental 149; religious 104, 106; rule of 50
- lease system 210
- lecturers 109
- leheq* 52
- liberalism 35, 49–54
- liberalization 196, 199
- liberation front 127
- liberation movements 1, 21, 22
- life: circle of 172–3; quality of 132
- lisane nigus* 118
- literacy: legal 105
- livestock 155
- loans 193; structural adjustment 195
- lobbying 96, 108–9
- London 86
- love 183–4, 185
- Maale 3, 117–29
- McCarthyism 53
- macroeconomic adjustment 194
- macroeconomic stability 194
- male dominance 140
- marketplace 163, 169
- marriage: early 138; forced 138
- martyrdom 46
- Marxism 31, 32–49; infant 35; instrumentalist 48
- masesha* 171–2
- material deprivation 132
- medicine 184
- mehret* 43
- mekeneyatawinat* 49
- Mekonnen, W. 38
- Mekuria, T. 8, 9
- melting pot 62
- memory: homeland 84–5; reconstructing 2, 5
- menegest* 7, 16, 18; static 16–21
- Menelik: Emperor 36, 84
- mesgana* 39
- Metamorphosis* 182, **183**
- mewa'ele zena* 10
- middle class 127
- MIDROC group 204, 205
- Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) 98
- minority groups 9, 22–3, 74, 121
- Mitiku, H. 159
- mizug galuyot* 61
- mobilisation: political 80; social 119–21, 128
- modernity 7, 42, 121, 126; Western 43, 46
- modernization 53, 61, 129
- monolingualism 117, 118
- monuments 14
- mortgages 64
- mosaic 182
- mother land 123
- mothers 167; child 138
- mourning: public 41
- mud 175, 181
- mud dance **182**
- multilingualism 119
- murder 42

INDEX

- museums 13
- Muslims 31
- mythology 178

- nach sheber* 41
- names 18, 24; royal 12
- nation 24, 52; symbol of 120
- National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE) 101–2
- National Machinery for the Advancement of Women 93–8
- National Office of Population 159
- National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW) 92, 98–101
- National Population Council 159
- national question 33, 34, 38, 51
- National Women's Discourse 111
- nationalism 3, 22, 80, 87, 119; closed 121; diaspora 89; Ethiopian 36, 38; ethnic 3, 120, 128; geographical 120–1; long-distance 85; Maale 121–6; open 121; pan-Ethiopian 89; regional 128
- nationalization 197
- natural resources 144, 148, 152, 153
- neges* 17
- neo-liberalism 3, 192–5
- networking 109–10
- networks 128
- newspaper 167
- NGOs 107–10, 111; conservation 150; service delivery 143
- nobility: era of 8
- North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry 69

- obedience 94, 138
- obelisks 12
- Ocholoni Shach* **166**
- Operation Solomon 67
- oppressor group 81, 83
- Oromo 50, 80, 83–4
- Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) 22, 85
- output growth 196
- over-crowding 207–8

- paint 165, 167
- palshu* 67
- pardon 43
- parents 125
- participation: independent 142
- past: reconstructing 13
- pastoralists 152, 155
- patience 187
- patriarchal cooking pot 106
- patriarchy 140
- Peasant Associations 197
- peasantry 33, 48, 153, 154

- Penal Code 11
- people: classifying 52; free 81; land of 52
- Petros, B. 85
- pilgrimages 74
- pillage 16
- pillars 179
- plot: comprehensible 7; historical 7–8
- policing 19
- policy conditionality 193
- policy evaporation 106
- Policy Framework Paper (PFP) 194, 199
- political climate 110
- political instrument 95, 98
- polygamy 139
- population 19, 136; and development 155–60; Jewish 61; rural 144
- population growth 146, 156, 210; and poverty 156
- Portrait* **174, 175**
- Portuguese 45
- poverty 54, 69, 131, 132, **134**; as capability deprivation 135; and environmental problems 145; and population growth 156; reducing 99; rural 153; and unfreedom 133; urban 206–7; and women 141; and World Bank 195
- power 6, 10, 132
- praise 39
- prehistory 7
- pride: historical 91
- prime minister 9–10
- Prime Minister's Office 95
- printing press 20
- private chambers 20
- private sector 194, 204
- privatization 200–5, 202, 203, 206
- production 135
- productivity 205, 206
- professions: despised 67–8
- property ownership 135, 141
- prostitution: child 158
- protests 70
- public expenditure 206
- public ownership 202
- python 182

- qay sheber* *see* Red Terror
- qelad* 18
- Qenejet 39–40

- racism 70
- radicalism 2, 32, 97, 109
- radicalization 32
- raey* 49
- railway 19–20
- rains 144
- rape 136–7, 158

INDEX

- rational choice 196
- Rational Mind* 20
- rationality 49
- realities 53
- reconciliation 43
- Red Terror 41, 42, 46, 86
- reform packages 193, 194
- refugees 69, 148
- Regional Offices of Population 159
- regions 9, 106–7; administrative **201**;
 autonomy 104, 123; overlapping 24;
 peripheral 16, 23, 118
- relationships 184–5
- relics 13
- religion 104–5, 157
- religious holidays 72
- religious stress 71–2
- representational crisis 23, 24, 25
- repression 93–4, 110
- reproductive rights 157
- resettlement 148, 197
- resistance 121–2
- return: impossible 60, 73–4, 75; law of 69
- revenues 194–5
- revolution 2, 26, 34, 55; bloodless 40; cultural
 141; enemies of 42; Eritrean Revolution 32;
 explaining 46–7; February Revolution 24;
 generation of 31–2
- rhetoric 142
- Rift Valley 146
- Rio Summit 149
- rituals 175, 177
- royal chronicles 10, 14, 15
- royal dynasty 14–15
- royal succession 12
- rulers 10, 14, 34
- ruling centre 16
- ruling classes 49

- sacrifice 38, 46
- saints 16
- sanitation 208, 209
- saving rates 194
- scholarships 17, 165–6
- scribes 21
- seatat* 164
- Seatat Collage* **164**
- Seatat Graphic* **165**
- secession 33, 34, 47
- seclusion 1, 91
- segregation 63
- Selassie, H. 8, 32
- Selecha* (from *What is Love?*) **187**
- selechas* 183–4, 187
- self-definition 51
- self-determination 21, 33, 34, 47, 87, 135
- self-rule 1

- Sellars, P. 183, 188
- separatist movements 127, 129
- sewerage system 208, 209
- sexual harassment 139
- sexuality 135, 140
- shelters 210
- Shem 81
- shoes 34
- silence 22–3
- Sime, E. 3, 163–89, **183, 189**
- slavery 93
- slogans 166
- social agency 140, 141
- social conditions 64–6, 119
- social development 46, 52
- social engineering 196
- A Social History of Ethiopia* (Pankhurst) 16
- social infrastructure 196
- social leaders 140
- social mobilisation 119–21, 128
- social mobility 48
- social roots 23
- socialism 40, 197
- soft area approaches 111
- soil erosion 145, 147, 154
- soil humus 147
- soldiers 20, 32, 40, 200, 206
- solidarity 65
- Solomon: King 11, 12
- songs 125
- sovereigns 53
- spiritual leaders 127
- squatter units 210
- stabilization 199
- state 7, 18, 24; challenging 108, 109;
 continuity of 9; engaging 141; European
 model 17; federated 24; forms of 17;
 function of 18; functionaries 17; legitimacy
 of 6; ministers 17; modern 17, 18, 20, 126,
 127; revolutionary 9, 24; role of 143;
 subjects of 18; unity of 7
- statelessness 60
- stitches 176, 178
- Storia d'Etiochia* (Conti-Rossini) 14
- stories 125
- straw 175, 181
- structural adjustment programmes 193, 195–
 6, 199, 200, 206
- structural reforms 194–5
- student movement 32, 83
- students 17, 63; radicalism 32
- subaltern groups 23
- subjects 18, 50, 53
- suicide 66
- suit 175
- superiority 82

INDEX

- tabooism 91
- Tamrat, T. 15
- taxes 18, 209–10
- Tefer* **172**
- temples 178, 179
- teret-teret* 180
- terminology 38–9
- territory 123; access to 120–1; boundaries of 79; ethnic 81; national 7
- theory 35
- Tigray 12, 34, 80
- Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 33, 34, 92
- tortoise 181
- touch 187–8
- traditions 61, 126, 128
- traitors 69
- transition 197–205
- transnational corporations 192–3
- transparency 204
- treaties: international 102–5
- tree house 168
- tribute 127
- tribute-payers 122
- trickle-down theory 33
- truth 6
- Tset* **171**
- turtles 185

- under-development 131, 132
- underclass 73
- unemployment 64–5, 135, 205–6
- United Kingdom (UK) 85–8
- unity 7, 9, 40, 55
- universalism: Western 48
- university 64
- urban crisis 205–7
- Urban Dwellers Association 197

- venus flytrap 184–5
- violence 158; against women (VAW) 136–41, 143; domestic 138
- vision 49
- voting 124

- war 49, 147–8, 200; history of 50; urban 37
- waste 208
- watch system 19
- water 208–9
- Wegagan Bank 205
- well-being 132

- weredas* 200
- What is Love ?* 184, **185**, **186**, **187**, **188**
- White Terror 41, 42
- wife-beating 138
- Woldemariam, W. 49–50
- Wollo 82
- woman question 92–3, 99, 110, 142
- women: agency 143; controlling 93; in education 93, 110, 135, 136; emancipation of 92, 93, 105–7, 142; in employment 93, 110, 135; empowerment of 55; grassroots concerns 100; inequality 135–43; leadership of 102; political participation 107; and poverty 141; radical 111; representation of 101, 103; rights of 102–5, 142, 157; violence against (VAW) 136–41, 143
- Women in Development (WID) 97
- Women Fighters Association of Tigray (WFAT) 93
- Women's Affairs Bureaus (WABs) 94
- Women's Affairs Departments (WADs) 94, 98
- Women's Affairs Office (WAO) 92, 94–8, 100–1
- women's organizations 107–10, 111, 139
- wonbers* 18
- wood 174, 179
- workers 204, 204
- working classes 61, 166–7
- working masses 24
- World Bank 195, 196
- World Trade Organization (WTO) 192
- writing system 45

- Yanesaw, A. 44–5
- yarn 168
- yasaltana polatica* 49
- Yediro Suk* **170**
- Yekatit Abyot* 24
- yelugnta* 42
- Yemegnot Alem* 173
- Yezaf Bet* **168**
- Yoktan 81
- youth 73

- Zar* spirit 71, 72
- zaweg* 51
- zega* 50, 53
- Zemene Mesafint* 8



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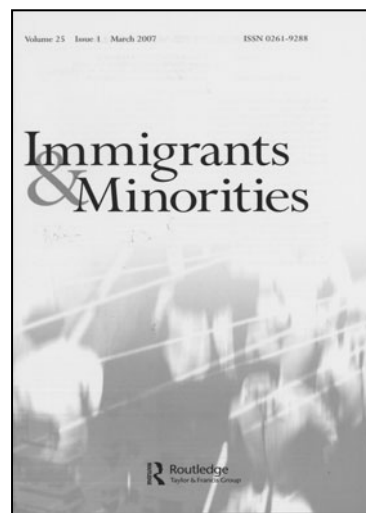
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